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UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

THOMAS NAIRN

*A Route Maist Devious:  
A Study of the Works  
of Sydney Goodsir Smith*

**SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The decade spanning 1980 to 1990 has seen a proliferation of critical studies and re-appraisal of the nature and development of Scottish literature. In this substantial body of work, however, little or no attention has been focused on the works of Sydney Goodsir Smith who, since his death in 1975, has come to seem increasingly isolated and neglected.

This thesis then aims to provide the first comprehensive examination of the eclectic span of Goodsir Smith's poetry, fiction and drama. The study draws on interviews with Goodsir Smith's literary contemporaries, family and friends and seeks to relate the works, where relevant, to the socio-political and literary context of the period, while examining some of the significant autobiographical material incorporated in the works.

Chapter One focuses on Goodsir Smith's early background and his growing attachment to both Scotland and Scottish literature and studies the nature of his earliest poetry in both Scots and English.

Chapter Two looks at the poetry written during World War Two, considers the combined influences of modernism and the Scottish renaissance as well as Goodsir Smith's growing interest in the long poem.

The end of World War Two signals the opening of a new phase, at once post-MacDiarmid and post-visionary. Chapters Three and Four of this thesis look at ways in which the literary context was changing and argues that Goodsir Smith's *Under The Eildon Tree* (1948) can be seen as breaking into new aesthetic areas and perspectives prefiguring developments emerging more fully in the 1950s as what we now recognise as the postmodern.

Chapter Five examines what may be termed parallel developments and looks at the shorter poetry written in the immediate post-war period, its related aesthetic components and its powerful biographical substrata.

Chapter Six moves into related though radically divergent areas of experimentation, the innovative prose fiction of *Carotid Cornucopius* and the challenging (and to date, unpublished) play *Colickie Meg*, pursuing the seminal strands of the postmodern. This chapter also considers the more conventional play, *The Wallace*.

Chapter Seven focuses on the complex amalgam of diverse approaches

collected in *Figs and Thistles*, framing the book as ranking, with *Under The Eildon Tree*, among Goodsir Smith's finest works.

Chapter Eight opens with a consideration of some aspects of the longer, more calm, if still deviant and discursive poetry of Goodsir Smith's later years. This leads on to the conclusion of this thesis with an assessment of the nature of Goodsir Smith's achievement. It is argued that not only is his work drastically under-rated, but that it will in the long term be seen as integral to the central experimental thrust of European and Anglo-American literature *and* as crucial to the development of modern Scottish literature. This is particularly so with regard to *Under The Eildon Tree* which moves significantly *beyond* the ground-breaking work of MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. It is also argued that this work suggests pathways into the future of Scottish literature which have been far from fully or even usefully explored.

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### DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work which it embodies has not been included in any other thesis. I have employed some of the ideas dealt with here in the article 'A Route Maist Devious: Sydney Goodsir Smith and Edinburgh' published in *Cencrastus* 33 (Spring 1989).

Signed  
(Thom Nairn)

Dated ... 16 Dec 1993 ...

## ABBREVIATIONS

(The primary texts of work by or about Sydney Goodsir Smith have been abbreviated in this study)

C. P.	<i>Collected Poems.</i>
S. W.	<i>Skail Wind.</i>
W.	<i>The Wanderer and Other Poems.</i>
D. W.	<i>The Deevil's Waltz.</i>
U. E. T.	<i>Under The Eildon Tree.</i>
F. S. G. S.	<i>For Sydney Goodsir Smith.</i>
S. L.	<i>So Late Into The Night.</i>
A. H.	<i>The Aipple and the Hazel.</i>
C.	<i>Cokkils.</i>
O.	<i>Omens.</i>
F. T.	<i>Figs and Thistles.</i>
C. C.	<i>Carotid Cornucopius.</i>
C. M.	<i>Colickie Meg.</i>
T. W.	<i>The Wallace.</i>
A. S. I.	<i>A Short Introduction to Scottish Literature.</i>
K. K. L.	<i>Kynd Kittock's Land.</i>

## CHAPTER ONE

### A ROUTE MAIST DEVIOUS<sup>1</sup>

#### I

Although frequently cited as ranking among the most accomplished, significant and influential Scottish poets of the twentieth century (so far), with Hugh MacDiarmid, with Sorley MacLean, the work of Sydney Goodsir Smith has been lamentably neglected since his death on 15 January 1975 (and indeed before that date). Critical studies of MacDiarmid abound and will doubtless multiply, his *Complete Poems* (two volumes) carefully edited by W. R. Aitken and Michael Grieve, is now available in paperback while the publication of Kenneth Buthlay's annotated edition of *A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle* in 1987 constitutes a significant development and intensification of the fastidious attentiveness which MacDiarmid's work demands and deserves. Meanwhile, Caracanet's MacDiarmid 200 programme is under way, aiming to publish a twelve volume *Collected Works* by 1999. Similarly, critical articles on Sorley MacLean continue to proliferate, theses as well as book length critical studies are both out and imminent. 1985 saw the publication of *Ris a' Bhruthaich* edited by William Gillies, a selection of his criticism and prose writing, while 1989 marked the appearance of *From Wood to Ridge*, his collected poems.

Critical attention too is increasingly being focused on Goodsir Smith's near contemporaries, Norman MacCaig, Robert Garioch, Edwin Morgan and Iain Crichton Smith to name but a few. This all bodes well for Scottish poetry but meanwhile if you care to scour the bookshops, you may be able to find Goodsir Smith's *The Wallace* (1960, reissued in paperback in 1985), a 12 page pamphlet, *Saltire Self Portraits 3*, an 'autobiographical' letter addressed to Maurice Lindsay in 1947, ostensibly to provide information towards a jacket note to the *Selected Poems* of that year. Lastly and almost unfortunately there are the *Collected Poems* published in 1975. This disappointing collection, edited with what appears to be uncharacteristic carelessness, by Goodsir Smith's close friend Tom Scott does the man no service. The text is notable for its glaring and substantial omissions, intentional or otherwise (Goodsir Smith was collaborating on the book at the time of his death and decided on a number of deletions himself). The decision to include a section entitled 'Additional Poems'

(six in all) at the book's conclusion 'for the sake of completeness' does absolutely *nothing* to constitute 'completeness' but rather accentuates the sparse nature of the main text: many many poems remain excised while the ordering of the poems strays often radically from the ordering of the original editions. This already disruptive agglomeration is further aggravated by a confusing deviation from published chronology: *Under The Eildon Tree* (1948) for instance appears after books such as *Omens* (1955) or *Figs and Thistles* (1959). The parameters employed appear to be based essentially on assembling the shorter work together in the first half of the book with the longer poems gathered in the latter half: while occasionally this has the coincidental effect of reflecting dates of composition rather than of publication the correlations are haphazard. The overall effect is to give a cramped and unrepresentative overview of Goodsir Smith's work while promoting a highly misleading suggestion of the nature of his poetic development.

On top of all this the text is riddled with typographical errors. The time then for a substantial renovation on the scale of that carried out by W. R. Aitken in his attention to MacDiarmid's *Complete Poems* is well overdue. Such an undertaking would constitute a major contribution towards more fully documenting and illustrating the nature and scope of Goodsir Smith's achievement as well as providing a clearer perspective on the complexities of his progression as a poet. Such a volume should also precipitate, an equally overdue, renewal of critical appraisal which would draw consideration of Goodsir Smith's work more fully to the forefront in assessment and examination, not only of the nature, development and direction of twentieth century Scottish poetry, but in any study or analysis of twentieth century Scottish literature *per se*. Too often, even in the more accomplished studies of Scottish literature, Goodsir Smith features as a series of cramped footnotes or asides amid pages devoted to MacDiarmid (though I do not mean to imply that Goodsir Smith is the only poet of major significance to suffer such a fate: MacDiarmid's giantism paradoxically created many a barrier inhibiting lucid and rational perception of the nature and achievements of contemporary Scottish literature, some of these are only now in the 1990s beginning to break down).

There are though numerous attendant factors which over the years have contributed to the critical neglect of Goodsir Smith's work. Ironically for one thing, so many people *liked* the man. This has led to a tendency among some of those who have written on Goodsir Smith to lapse into an occasionally sycophantic 'Good Old Sydney' syndrome,

which invariably renders such excursions devoid of serious critical worth. This inclination was to some extent initiated and exacerbated by Goodsir Smith's sudden and unexpected death in his 59th year, an event which cast, and in some cases continues to cast, a long and dark shadow on the lives of his contemporaries. There remains (an understandable) reluctance in talking to the likes of Norman MacCaig or Callum MacDonald to delve too deeply on the topic of Goodsir Smith, of the 40s and 50s. Nonetheless it must be stressed here that MacCaig and a number of other notable exceptions were not among those mincing their words however close their friendships. Alexander Scott for one had a sharp eye for inadequacies, of Goodsir Smith's first book, *Skail Wind*, he wrote:

In this collection Goodsir Smith is still swithering between Scots and English, without showing any considerable command of either. The earlier poems are in an English inflated by late romantic rhetoric; others while ostensibly in Scots, are still largely English in idiom and vocabulary, although occasional Scotticisms are scattered here and there like groats in a plum pudding; and others again are in a Scots so densely archaic as to be well-nigh-or entirely-incomprehensible.<sup>2</sup>

Implicitly here, greater things are to come, but critics of Goodsir Smith's work are not always prepared to unleash such a rigorous eye.

The dearth of important critical work, as well as the paucity or unreliable nature of Goodsir Smith's work in print are attributable to several related factors. For one thing Goodsir Smith himself was never the manic self-publicist MacDiarmid so conspicuously was virtually to the end of his days. Attendant to this point there have been no Kenneth Buthlays, Duncan Glens or Alan Bolds to promote, criticise, discuss or edit Goodsir Smith in the way these writers so assiduously supplemented MacDiarmid's efforts on his own behalf: not to mention both Bold and Buthlay's significant contributions *since* MacDiarmid's death in 1978. How much of MacDiarmid's work would now be quite so readily available without their efforts is a debatable point but one worth bearing in mind. While MacDiarmid's flamboyance and rigorous experimentation has drawn the praise, the analyses as well as the flak, his predominance remains an ambivalent vector in Scottish literature, his influence destroying as many poets as it has nurtured.



Beyond considerations derived from that broader context however my principal concerns are with Goodsir Smith's poetry itself. His achievements are manifold, ranging from the sparse yet compressed lyrics to be found in a collection such as *So Late Into The Night* (1952), to the expansive layering and juxtaposition of rhetorical textures in the elegies of *Under The Eildon Tree* (1948): reaching out too, there are the deceptively light, almost conversational monologues of his later long poems while he also produced significant contributions in the areas of experimental fiction and drama.

Such diversity is in itself provocative of closer study and when you begin to look more closely at the relentless and distinctive evolution of Goodsir Smith's work a closer commentary on a persistently metamorphic mode of development seems increasingly essential. My principal objectives here then are to track out and examine the refinement and development of ideas, aims, inputs and influences, technique and style. Eventually, to chart Goodsir Smith's aesthetic course through a chronological consideration of the substantial body of work he produced: this, where relevant or necessary, with regard to biographical correlatives and, again when relevant, contemporary events outwith the more immediately biographical context. Ultimately, in the course of this examination, to particularise the specific nature of Goodsir Smith's achievements and his significance to both the orientation and progression of Scottish poetry in the twentieth century.

## 2

Over the years a great deal of superfluous astonishment has been expressed that a poet born in New Zealand (26 October 1915) should succeed in producing a substantial and accomplished body of work written in Scots. There are several pertinent aspects to be borne in mind here. Firstly, Goodsir Smith was unequivocal about the essentially *experimental* nature of his forays and delvings into the Scots language. This is common ground with writers from MacDiarmid through to the more contemporary developments in the use of Scots from writers as diverse as Tom Leonard, Raymond Vettese and Sheena Blackhall.<sup>3</sup>

The notion that Scots constitutes a more 'natural' and appropriate medium for Scottish writers is both misleading and still strangely prevalent. As far as the twentieth century is concerned the use of

Scots has been, and remains, primarily an aesthetic strategy employed to supersede what can be termed the dead ground floor of the 'English' language. The seminal impetus provided by MacDiarmid in the 20s remains essentially paradigmatic of contemporary practice. MacDiarmid was initially quite hostile to the attempted revitalisation of Scots as a medium for poetry. But as was quickly to become apparent, MacDiarmid never balked at taking the diametrically opposite tack to previous inclinations if he could find there something he could utilise for his own purposes, a point amply exemplified in his subsequent abandonment (some still feel 'betrayal' or 'desertion' to be more apt) of Scots to pursue what he was to term experiments in 'synthetic English': an adaptation of the French critic Denis Seaurat's phrase 'synthetic Scots' as applied to MacDiarmid's work of the 20s. Ironically, by the time of MacDiarmid's far-famed feud with Edwin Muir subsequent to the publication of Muir's *Scott and Scotland* in 1936, attacking and in some quarters undermining (in others providing good fuel for) the ongoing endeavours of many writers to revamp Scots as a literary medium, MacDiarmid himself had to all practical purposes abandoned Scots for pastures new.

Initially though it was the work of Lewis Spence which caught MacDiarmid's eye, suggesting a ground base on which he perceived more ambitious projects could be constructed. MacDiarmid had no real interest in aspiring to any purist concept of Scots, instead he pillaged dictionaries regardless of historic context or origin of dialect, employing the obscure, archaic or esoteric to nail together his first Scottish lyrics, hence the appellation 'synthetic'.<sup>4</sup>

MacDiarmid fully perceived the linguistic and stylistic potential he had unearthed in his delvings: the purely phonetic resources alone fascinated him even before consideration of the startling and unsuspected semantic range, resonance and complexity of the vocabulary itself. The conclusive step though which made all the difference was that MacDiarmid brought an intrinsically *modernist* perspective to bear on such hitherto unsuspected (by MacDiarmid) linguistic resources. In his poem 'Gairmscoile' from his second collection of lyrics *Penny Wheep* (1926) he explores and exemplifies the potential he perceives:

– And there's forgotten shibboleths o' the Scots  
 Ha'e keys to senses lockit to us yet  
 – Coorse words that shamle thro' oor minds like stots,  
 Syne turn on's muckle een wi' doonsin' emerauds lit.<sup>5</sup>

What differentiates this significantly from the work in Scots of his contemporaries however is the underlying awareness of contemporary developments in psychology and the attendant ease with which he establishes a vivid and unsettling cerebral landscape. In these respects, and there are any number of supporting examples, MacDiarmid's work is in tune with that of the front line modernists: T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound.

The ground base then to MacDiarmid's linguistic experimentation should be considered with such broader parameters in mind: with Joyce or with Eliot he was essentially worrying away at language, at subject, at the possible, and bringing to bear diverse aspects of contemporary thought while employing and pursuing the standards of his era's *avant garde*, to take Scottish poetry and literature (and ideas) into new places, essentially, at this already late stage, into the twentieth century.

I have no intention of implying here that the use of Scots by modern writers is devoid of socio-political or even psychological concomitants. That dimension is very real and of ongoing and increasing relevance, as the remarks of J. Derrick McClure succinctly illustrate:

It would be a distortion of the facts (but one which it is very easy to imagine being perpetrated) to suggest that attempts at developing and encouraging Scottish culture, including its linguistic aspects, are a mere guise for movements towards Scottish political independence: the two are in reality inseparable, different sides of the same coin.<sup>6</sup>

My central point though is that in most cases a decision to write in Scots is hinged on aesthetic considerations first and on any range of socio-political correlations second. That Goodsir Smith's inclinations and motivations for working in Scots were primarily aesthetic and fundamentally on a parallel with those of MacDiarmid should become amply apparent in subsequent discussion of the poetry itself. In the meantime however on a lighter if significant note it is worth considering a short, tongue in cheek, poem which appeared in *The Scotsman* of 8 January 1947 under the title 'Synthetic and Plastic':

Sir –

The terms, Synthetic and Plastic are  
Grammatic, Aesthetic, and Polemical;

The Makars use them in this sense  
 But the Critics in the Chemical.  
 The consequent analysis is  
 For academic analphabetical  
 That Makars are born and Critics made –  
 The latter, of course, synthetical.

This was one of Goodsir Smith's contributions to *The Scotsman's* letters page which was in the midst of one of its occasional flurries of debate over the validity and nature of 'synthetic' (or 'plastic') Scots. This debate was at its peak in 1946, precipitated by the use of the term 'plastic Scots' by James Fergusson which courted a broadside from MacDiarmid, largely via the pages of *The Glasgow Herald*.

For present purposes however the main point pertaining to this issue is Goodsir Smith's straightforward contextualisation of these terms in the realms of the 'Grammatic', 'Aesthetic' and 'Polemical': which clearly emphasises where Goodsir Smith's own notions of his use of Scots, of whatever denomination, are located. In this respect too it is interesting to bear in mind that it was in 1947 that Goodsir Smith published the first tentative version of his experimental novel *Carotid Cornucopius*, a work of considerable lexical deviation and which if still identifiably, if vestigially, Scots in orientation, is in real terms as far from the 'synthetic Scots' ostensibly under discussion as MacDiarmid's own dense geological weave in a poem like 'On A Raised Beach'.

MacDiarmid himself, writing to the *Free Man* (no.8 August 1942) in response to negative reviews of Goodsir Smith's *Skail Wind* is emphatic in the choice of context he employs in discussing the book: ' – I welcome and approve his experimentation and the rich synthetic vocabulary he employs'. Outwith such essentially aesthetic parameters however there is a secondary consideration to take into account with regard to Goodsir Smith's use of Scots. Although Goodsir Smith was indeed born in New Zealand in 1915 he also left that country at the age of two, not twelve as occasionally stated. In 1917 escorted by his mother (Catherine) Goodsir Smith set sail for Egypt where his father, Sir Sydney Smith, latterly Professor of Forensic Medicine at Edinburgh, was with the R.A.M.C.

So began, to pirate a later line of Goodsir Smith's, 'a route maist devious' indeed.<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on those early years in the above mentioned autobiographical letter to Maurice Lindsay, dated 3 April 1947, Goodsir Smith notes:

Our ship was unfortunately torpedoed by the German raider *Emden* and we were put ashore by the chivalrous captain of that ship at Singapore where I idled away several months in rickshaws and no doubt contracted those habits of sloth from which I have never since wholly recovered.<sup>8</sup>

It is apparent even in these brief lines that Goodsir Smith is a willing and competent conspirator in assisting the construction of his bandit bohemian and boozy bard persona, manifest in many aspects of the poetry itself as well as in his stravaiging the bars of Edinburgh's Rose Street. But, stepping back to Singapore, these disruptions mark the beginnings of a phase of comparative restlessness and wandering, enforced and otherwise, which was to hold sway until the mid 1940s. The family was eventually reunited in Egypt before travelling on to Scotland for a short period during which Goodsir Smith's sister, Betty, was born in Edinburgh.

This was followed by a further sojourn in Egypt before a return to Britain in 1921. At this stage Goodsir Smith was dispatched to school, in Dorset (Hill Crest at Swanage) of which he always retained very happy memories, and subsequently to Malvern at thirteen, to which he was largely indifferent.<sup>9</sup>

However, although Goodsir Smith's early education was in England both Hill Crest and Malvern were at the time popular places for (wealthier) Scottish families to send their children. That aspect notwithstanding, Goodsir Smith's tongue was sufficiently alien to earn him the nickname 'Mac', albeit in England it does not take much of an 'accent' to earn such an epithet.

In addition, during this period, six to the age of thirteen, Goodsir Smith's summer, and often Christmas, vacations were spent in the village of Moniaive in Dumfriesshire. So it is hardly viable to portray Goodsir Smith growing up in an English linguistic vacuum; in fact throughout these formative years he was in regular if hardly exclusive touch with spoken Scots. Further substantiation that Scots was far from an alien tongue is to be found in letters he sent to his family, written as early as 1924, when he was nine, in which he employs, albeit self-consciously, various items of Scottish vocabulary.<sup>10</sup> This tends on the whole to substantiate Goodsir Smith's own recollection of his Moniaive days: in his letter to Maurice Lindsay for instance he recalls his first 'passion' for one May Maxwell to whom, he says, he addressed ' – verses written – in the ordinary dialect that we used'.<sup>11</sup>

If, bearing all of this in mind, Goodsir Smith's 'route' towards the use of Scots emerges as rather less than 'devious' his journey leading to some kind of 'settled' (a dubious word to apply to Goodsir Smith at any stage) base in post-war Edinburgh, a city which in many guises was to pervade his finest work, continued, in the wake of Malvern, to pursue a characteristically wayward and circumnavigatous course. In 1931 Goodsir Smith gratefully left Malvern harbouring the keen ambition to become an artist (an occupation he pursued, usually in the summer months spent with close friends at Plockton, for the rest of his life). His own, fondly romanticised, assessment of his time at Malvern has him doing nothing but '– write and paint and caricature, and start a magazine' and generally to make a nuisance of himself, one housemaster for instance reaching the premature conclusion that he was a Bolshevik.<sup>12</sup>

Reunited with his family in Edinburgh however such aspirations were swiftly vetoed by his parents who envisaged him rather following in his father's footsteps. This resulted in a ridiculously abortive attempt to study medicine at Edinburgh. He could not stand the anatomy classes for one thing, the dissection of corpses appalled him: he also managed to score seven percent in his chemistry examination.<sup>13</sup> Not too surprisingly this signalled an end to his career in medicine and saw him instead dispatched to Oxford in 1933 for a four year stint, this time studying history, with marginally more success. He did get his degree but not without a few bumps along the way as a consequence of his increasingly wayward inclinations, he described his stay at Oxford as:

– three or four crowded years of glorious life, unfortunately marred by being expelled from College (Oriel) by that prize oaf and shit Sir David Ross.<sup>14</sup>

The reason he cites for this termination of his residence in Oriel is 'drunkenness and idleness', again a pointer to his penchant for perpetuating his disguise. This, aside from its intrinsic humour, is an aspect of primary interest in his letter to Lindsay; tongue firmly in cheek with veiled allusion to incestuous passion, homosexual flirtation, 'bothered (though not buggered)', and general accounts of dissipation, seemingly aimed as much for the discomfiture of the soundly respectable Mr Lindsay and the Saltire Society as for his amusement, their enlightenment or manipulating his own image.

Following his final departure from Oxford Goodsir Smith spent a year, 1937-1938, trying to establish himself as a writer. This turned out to be



a fruitless and unhappy exercise. The work he produced in this period, purportedly a play and a collection of poems, pleased neither himself nor the (only) publisher (Faber) to whom he submitted the poetry. Further, (a) as a Scot and (b) as something of a proto-idealist-socialist, he found the *milieu* of 'literary London' highly distasteful and appears to have immersed himself in alcohol more heavily than his work. One notable event, if in accordance with his activities at this time, doomed to failure, was his attempt to fight in Spain with the Communists. The adventure though was terminated in Paris when it was discovered he suffered from chronic asthma. There followed chaotic skirmishes in Paris, a brief teaching stint in Dorset before, tail well between legs, returning to Edinburgh.

This precipitated a period of dark depression, a propensity which, like his asthma, was to haunt him intermittently for the rest of his days.<sup>15</sup> Even given that this brings us to the verge of the universal chaos of the Second World War, Goodsir Smith's gradual emergence from a, perhaps long cultivated, trough, coincides with a general upturn in his fortunes. In 1938 he met Marion Welsh, with whom, considerable parental opposition notwithstanding, he was soon to live and then to marry in 1939. By this time too he was already working on the poems which would culminate in the publication of his first book *Skail Wind* in 1941 from the Edinburgh publishers The Chalmers Press.

From the tentative remarks cited above from Alexander Scott (highly critical) and Hugh MacDiarmid (substantial praise) it is clear that the book registered very differently with different readers and critics. This is accounted for by the highly ambivalent nature of the book itself. There is much therein to substantiate Scott's criticisms, equally there is much to validate MacDiarmid's praise. At this stage in the proceedings, as a kind of ground base, it is worth taking into consideration some of that book's more negative qualities for they not only suggest a good deal about the man himself but provide a useful and realistic gauge by which to examine and measure some of the finer work in this collection while providing a touchstone when we come to consider some of the more remarkable subsequent developments in this writer's work.

### 3

*Skail Wind* by Sydney Smith (for there's nary a Goodsir in sight with this collection) is dedicated to his wife Marion and is accompanied by this dedicatory verse:

Oor deep warm corrie's fund,  
 Strang 'gin the fuddrie, dear;  
 The kelpies goul, an cauld's the wund –  
 They cannae sturt us here!

Here the Scots of this introductory love poem is reasonably coarse and accomplished while also signalling hallmarks that will pervade his later love poems, and work well beyond. The lovers are outlaws, outcasts, their warm shelter from a hostile world of symbolic-mythological monsters and the, equally symbolic, violence of the elements, lies in (and in turn represents) their closeness itself, as if they generate a force field encapsulating their own private world from which everything and everyone is excluded. Given the prevalence of this theme, and it runs throughout the entire body of his work, it is not too surprising to discover that, so far as families were concerned, Goodsir Smith's marriages both to Marion Welsh and latterly to Hazel Williamson precipitated diverse ostracisms of one kind or another: bannings from the house and termination of communication were often the order of the day.

In the security (always precarious) Goodsir Smith appends to such scenarios there lies the suggestion of an inherent inclination to return to the womb, with company mind you. This too is a thematic strand which will emerge again and again in his work, paralleled by a sometimes disconcerting yearning for nullity, the poppy and somnolence are recurrent manifestations of this strand.

The verse cited above is echoed by the prelim from MacDiarmid, whom at this stage Goodsir Smith had yet to meet, though by 1938 Hector MacIver had introduced him to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* and was encouraging his use of Scots:<sup>16</sup>

Here is the cavaburd in which Earth's tint.  
 There's naebody but Oblivion and us,  
 Puir gangrel buddies, wanderin' hameless in't.

But if the opening scenario seems to bode well all is not so convincing within. While the romantic streak in Goodsir Smith was never too far from the surface resulting sometimes in oversentimentality there are occasions here where he goes totally overboard and lapses into the plain embarrassing, witness these lines from 'Four Songs':



So here's the warld an its ills tae hell!  
 An here's tae the dear I loo!  
 Come rookety-coo an kiss me, luve,  
 My ain sweet dilly doo!

(S.W. p. 20)

I do not really see either Goodsir Smith or Tom Scott, by the mid 1970s, requiring prolonged discussion on whether or not to delete *that* one. (For the record, only fourteen of the forty poems included in *Skail Wind* were included in the *Collected Poems*). 'Sydney Smith' also displays a hankering after the grandiose, you can often pick up echoes of Dylan Thomas (an echo sometimes perceptible in Goodsir Smith's readings as well) and the Apocalypics in this early work, whether in Scots or English. There are many such examples ('Written in the 20th Century', 'The Weird O Scotland is the Makar's Too') all posing their own difficulties and inadequacies, but a sample extract from 'By The Solway', should indicate some of the archaic, self-conscious, overblown components as well as the shackles of alien voices Goodsir Smith is in the process of shaking off, or more accurately, learning to control:

Linger, linger green, my fields, glistening garden, linger  
 my sobbing trees  
 Neth vagrant skies, O gangrel wandering cloudland, my smooth  
 boulders,  
 Pebbles, spurs along this open firth, grey now i the auld  
 evening;  
 Bind this rough wall here for a hundred lives and more of men,  
 Bide my little linties in your branches, on this rampart sill,  
 My wordless children, linger; roses, friends, the time is fleet  
 For little talking.

(S.W. p. 12)

Here we can find some obvious examples illustrating Scott's earlier criticisms as well as a few others worth drawing attention to. The Scots here is embarrassingly vestigial while the syntax, rhetoric, inversion, refrains and imagery are intrinsically English. In terms of subject matter the effect is something along the lines of T. S. Eliot meets the Apocalypics. The results are both archaic and ungainly hinting at neither the compression and easy fluency nor the fusion of complex levels of language and rhetoric Goodsir Smith later mastered. This work rather

seems to have been assembled painfully word by word accompanied by a wild clutching at any and every passing literary movement, technique, device or hazy notion for incorporation somewhere in the weave.

Before moving on to look at some of the more positive aspects of this book there are one or two last points to bear in mind. There is an uncomfortable self-consciousness in evidence in many of these poems, characterised for instance in a line such as: 'An alien bardie creppit through my brain's sad halls', from 'The Weir o Scotland is the Makar's Too', (S.W. p. 15). Such reminders that we are dealing with 'a poet' here pervade the book, this can be unsettling, contrived and unsatisfactory at this stage: a reader unfamiliar with later developments could be forgiven for concluding that this man's desire to be a poet is rather more substantial than his talent. Similarly Goodsir Smith's provision of an internalised landscape seems both blatant and clumsy as well as clichéd given the barriers already broken down by the modernists.

If work of the standard cited above was all that was on offer here it would be understandable if Goodsir Smith had chosen to do a Norman MacCaig, refusing to include his first two books in his *Collected Poems* and offering financial remuneration to anyone prepared to deliver original editions into his custody with a view to fueling a Festival bonfire. While the truncation of *Skail Wind* as it appears in his *Collected Poems* suggests that is at least partially the case, either ironically, paradoxically or by masterly cunning Goodsir Smith managed to utilise and channel many of the primary defects apparent in this book and make them work for him; deploying them with tactical and strategic insight within carefully constructed contexts to achieve unique effects well outwith the range of his earliest work. This is an aspect to which I will return but for now it will be useful to take a closer look at a few of the more successful poems here and to identify pervasive characteristics, preoccupations, techniques and devices which we will find in more elaborate and expansive forms as the work progresses.

#### 4

Broadly speaking, on first acquaintance *Skail Wind* can seem a fairly eclectic collection, and not just in terms of its mixture of 'good' and 'bad'. This is particularly notable with regard to the language employed and to the disparate verse forms incorporated. These range from unrhymed

sonnets in English such as 'The Last Dusk' and 'A Day Apart' to the massive line lengths and complex syntax of the 'Ode to Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)', which although written ostensibly in Scots again retains a distinctively English veneer in stylistic terms. Similarly in 'The Quickening' there are the high flown terms of the rhapsodist while in other poems, 'Song: The Train frae Brig o' Earn' or 'Song: The Steeple Bar, Perth' there are simpler much more direct lyric forms in rhymed Scots. Further, there is the lengthy and syntactically elaborate 'The Refugees: A Complaynt', employing a much more dense Scots vocabulary (although I'd argue nowhere so dense as the 'well-nigh-or entirely- incomprehensible' noted above by Scott) and distinctive in the explicit nature of its socio-political orientation.

Such aspects are indicative of Goodsir Smith's restlessness and experimentation, his desire to tackle his central concerns from diverse viewpoints employing equally diverse structural, formal and linguistic techniques: sometimes failures are the only real way to move. Beyond this level though it is possible to enumerate a number of central thematic strands and an underlying, if incidental, structural logic which indicates the nature of work to come as well as pinpointing factors which will prove crucial to the development and evolution of Goodsir Smith's poetry.

Goodsir Smith's central technique in these early poems owes much to the early influence of T. S. Eliot and is derived primarily from Eliot's ideas on objective correlative. In his 1919 piece on Hamlet Eliot states his case characteristically clinically:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.<sup>17</sup>

This is really only a starting point however for Goodsir Smith's utilisation of such ideas, stable fundamentals of literary criticism and practice, is at once more complex yet more approachable, or at any rate, less austere. Emotional or intellectual conditions, states or activity are evoked in symbolic terms and in turn developed, accentuated or expanded in significance both by paralleling and/or contrasting these internal or subjective states with images drawn from the landscape or cityscape, in effect the outside or objective world. That is,

intrinsic conditions (sadness, pessimism, anxiety, loneliness, apprehension) are provided with echoes in the extrinsic world. For Goodsir Smith the former is the most vivid and potentially significant; his extrinsic images, however powerful, are invariably subsumed and relegated as dull or misted mirror images of the intrinsic or subjective world.

Sydney Goodsir Smith is in practice a poet very different from Eliot, as critics too they were worlds apart. He had none of Eliot's insistence on aesthetic distance or impersonal theory in poetry and deals with emotion in his own poetry in highly personal though complex terms which serves to heighten our own perceptions of perhaps familiar if difficult to define complexes of emotion in relation to environment, to landscape and on a deeper level, to prevailing (or impending) socio-political considerations. This is a component particularly manifest in these early poems where the imminence or actuality of the Second World War is invoked as a further backcloth, often subliminal or sub-stratal, colouring and developing the central parallel and contrast of intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions, symbols and images.

While this last dimension then may be seen as a direct descendant of Eliot's objective correlative this is really only one component in the broader perspective on Goodsir Smith's technique which in its fullest sense could almost be seen as an inversion of Eliot's ideas. It could be argued that, given the subordination of paralleled objective symbolism to the intrinsic emotional complex and invocation of the mechanisms of cerebral and mental processes in paradoxically vivid and physical images, Goodsir Smith's principles of construction effectively constitute a 'subjective correlative'.

This central methodology pervades the poetry here and is manifest in both blatant and subtle forms though the overall effect is essentially cumulative, assuming its fullest embodiment in the context of an overview of the book as a whole. To illustrate and to elaborate on these ideas we can turn to a more detailed examination of their function and incorporation in the poetry itself. The kinds of intrinsic, cerebral perspectives Goodsir Smith is constructing are clearly enunciated in the opening lines of 'The Last Dusk':

They stalk across with great insane feet,  
The sombre beasts that walk the mind's grey corridors.

(S.W. p. 40)

If, as in 'the brain's sad halls' cited above, such imagery is a little too explicit for such esoteric subject matter it still provides a clear example of Goodsir Smith's inclinations. These are realms in which 'Ungainly camel-shapes' (S.W. p. 40) lurk in the mind's crevices, just beyond 'the slammed doors of vision's corners' (S.W. p. 40), unsought, these are beasts whose shadows flicker in every mind:

Some old who lived too long, some young too blindly,  
Each all see beasts, receive their burden and black wounds.  
Each all are doomed culpable, nor blame save tear-filled urns.  
(S.W. p. 40)

This, though more successful, does still suffer from some of the problems besetting Goodsir Smith's early work. In the lines above, there is ungainly syntactic distortion resulting from the constraints of the sonnet form. Elsewhere in the poem there are awkward conjunctions of clumsy enjambment with oblique end-stops which prove rhythmically disruptive. The poem is useful though not only in illustrating a characteristic approach but in demonstrating that the resulting work is neither confessional self-indulgence nor narrowly solipsistic: he is concerned with people in the broadest sense and their response or vulnerability to objective phenomena or circumstance. Where the writer's personal experience or emotion is employed it is to illustrate a wider correlation between the emotion or perception and the objective world which in turn serves to illustrate or drive home a more broadly based point outwith the scope of initial derivation. This is an approach which entails wider implications and it is worth pursuing ways in which it is employed in some of the other poems here.

Goodsir Smith for one thing deploys the parallelism discussed above in a variety of ways, often in much more, ostensibly, simple terms. The technique is used as the basis of the short lyric 'Kinnoul Hill' which at the same time exemplifies the beginnings of the tight control and direct statement Goodsir Smith is capable of. The poem is essentially a lament for an absent lover: 'My burds's dark een're far awa- / It's dreich tae bide alane', (S.W. p. 23). Correlations alternate from one context to another here as a sense of inner desolation and starkness finds its embodiment in Kinnoul Hill's winter bleakness:

It's cauld an gurl on Kinnoul Hill  
As Janiveer gaes oot,

But neer a blast sae shairp an fell  
As whorls my saul about.

(S.W. p. 23)

That inner desolation serves in turn to heighten the perception of desolation apparent in the extrinsic landscape:

O black's the ice on Kinnoul Brae,  
Dark scaurs like wa's o doom-  
But nane sae mirk's this dumb wae  
That maks aa Perth a tomb.

(S.W. p. 23)

This exemplifies one aspect of Goodsir Smith's inversion of Eliot's ideas. Here the intrinsic psychological perspective, an emotional intermixture of sadness, unease and apprehension, impress themselves on the landscape itself, intensifying our impression of that landscape while providing a secondary context broadening our interpretation and understanding of the poem's exploration of an elaborate emotional state. The process escalates, with internal and external scenarios consistently rounding on one another, accelerating and extending the poem's scope. The same fundamental method is brought to bear in 'Hornie wi the Green Ee' though the objective correlations are more expansive in conjunction with an intensified use of language and structural elaboration as well as a more prevalent strand of symbolism. In this poem bleak and devil-haunted landscapes serve to mirror a bereft and barren soul:

He's reift awa my dearest love,  
Wha kens whit guid til him?  
An Dali Sound is Hornie's ain-  
The land he rules is grou and grim.

(S.W. p. 23)

Here the alternation to evocation of bleak and ominous landscape (echoing the emotional complex) in terms of a realm under the devil's thumb invites cross reference to those more overt expressions of intrinsic or subjective perspectives, those 'sombre beasts', and turns our attention and perception once more to the internal scenarios of the poet's (or poem's persona's) emotion almost imperceptibly. A shift partly precipitated by the identification of that scenario as one initiated by the



(overtly symbolic) Devil himself. This sustains the essentially intangible nature of the experience, the elusiveness of final comprehension and clarification of the process. In many ways an overall effect reminiscent of the sense of mystery and epiphany apparent in MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots.

While the poems discussed here clearly have a highly personal dimension it is when they are considered in the broader context provided by the book as a whole that they begin to accumulate wider and more sinister cross-referential associations. This collection was assembled during the late 1930s and into the early years of the Second World War and from the outset that war, or threat of war, is an ever present if only occasionally fully tangible backdrop:

The trees, tho claithed wi spring, drap dowie tears o a hertdeep wound  
An the blinnin rain dings doon my saul that aa the drune o warburds  
canna stound.

(S.W. p. 23)

Here the almost subliminal stimulus of the background drone of the war-planes further supplements the overall impression of darkness, threat and sense of loss yet, characteristically, *secondary* to the emotional dimension. Effectively the planes too function as a strange embodiment and an objective parallel of those 'sombre beasts' which haunt the mind's corners seeming only too real and manifest in the machinery of war.

In this way poems such as 'A Day Apart' and 'Lament in the Second Winter of War' are infiltrated and coloured by surrounding work so that they begin to suggest more grave and wide reaching significances to the separation precipitating 'Kinnoul Hill' and the bereavement dealt with in 'Hornie wi the Green Ee'; integrating personal experience with perception of and reflections on an equally bleak world situation, a significant broadening of what can seem initially a narrow, too self-centred perspective.

The poems 'A Day Apart' and 'Lament in the Second Winter of War' are also of note in that they are instrumental in establishing a central duality of calm cut with menace, paralleling and further illustrating the internal, subjective exploration exemplified in 'The Last Dusk'. This duality derives primarily from a method of ironic juxtaposition. 'A Day Apart' for instance opens ominously, 'News tells of distant raids and unreal movements' (S.W. p. 43), 'unreal' because seemingly irreconcilable with the poem's

calm scenario, 'in this North sea harbour the bruit is far,' (S.W. p. 43). Yet the manifestations of war are there, ironically transformed:

From Leuchars the menacing shapes of planes  
Become picturesque against the important sky  
Whose tale is portending redness, day after night.

(S.W. p. 43)

The portents of war and its symptoms translate to pleasing images superimposed on a tranquil scenario, 'Here is no tumult nor horror nor evening editions thick as rumour' (S.W. p. 43). Yet behind the peaceful facade the drone of war and the menace it represents remain tangible, the 'sombre beasts' once more, still moving to disturb, 'And yet, and yet, I cannot sleep,' (S.W. p. 43).

The central juxtaposition is then extended to a broader analogy, 'So is blind man / Lulled by happy sentences spiced with corrected peril,' (S.W. p. 43), lines which encapsulate the essence of *Skail Wind* as a whole. For Goodsir Smith, the picturesque is often no more than the carapace shrouding reality's darker connotations: good and evil forces coexist and failure to accommodate and act in accordance with that knowledge is potentially damaging in any number of contexts.

'Lament in the Second Winter of War' utilises similar modes of juxtaposition, in this case more overtly cerebral in nature, 'Maun ever auld yirdit dreams disturb? Jist as ye're quiet / Couthy in a salt loch, loun, wi sleep?' (S.W. p. 9), the poem continues more explicitly:

Maun ilka couch o cynic ease (a bower they callt it aince, its noo  
the saul)  
Bud yon rede heron scrauchin thro the hoodit ears?  
Yir een maun watch the slaughtrous stramash, booted doom  
Fae sleep wheer aa ligs broun as the snug deep howe o the womb  
And oorie truth returns to ache lik snaw i the teeth  
And naethin but crottled despair beneath.

(S.W. p. 9)

Here again the context is essentially internalised, paralleling the objective invocation of the war, again dark shadows rise in threat, symbolised here by the dark forms of the gulls screeching above, an ambiguous symbol, tainted too by the after image of 'the menacing shapes of planes' central to the duality of subject matter. The bird



images appear throughout this collection and in 'Hornie wi the Green Ee' their dual significance and inherent ambiguity is spelled out:

The scrauch o the gulls belies their grace,  
A ferlie flight wi a warlock voice,

(S.W. p. 28)

Even buffered from the objective manifestations of war, the mind has its own cache of stored menace to twist around the calm, manifest in only half realised or registered associations between birds and planes, with the birds own essentially savage and scavenging natures an integral component in the complex.

Such prevalent preoccupation with cerebral, mental processes and their correlation to, or derivation from, the objective world, their parallels and dual natures, exemplified in the complex network of subjective symbolism built around the shadowy, screeching menace of the gulls, points the way to the identification of an acute self-awareness and process of analysis as central to the evolution of the poetry. In many ways Goodsir Smith's entire poetic odyssey may be seen as an increasingly detailed and elaborate examination of those 'grey corridors', and it is his own laboriously (in the best sense) developed sure-footedness which constitutes the major factor defining the distinctive evolution of his work. He worked extremely hard and studiously in the refinement of his work, a fact which sits ill with the persona he cultivated, the 'rantin' rovin' lad' MacDiarmid writes of in his introduction to Goodsir Smith's *Collected Poems*, but MacDiarmid too recognised the scholar:

- he was not long in acquiring a great knowledge of the Scots Poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and of its revival in the eighteenth century by Burns, Fergusson, Ramsay and others. He found there- and in our demotic language generally- qualities to which his whole nature responded and which he could not find in official English at all.

(C. P. p. xi)

MacDiarmid also significantly cites as additional firepower, 'transpositional inclusions from the vocabulary of the English poets of the 'nineties and from classical sources'. MacDiarmid relished such a concoction as well as the paradox of the man's character, if very different the two men shared a love of contrariness and unwillingness to compromise,

pervading their public and private lives as it does their poetries.

However, 'The Last Dusk' can usefully be tagged as the starting point in a movement towards a more and more highly developed sense of self-awareness, both personal and aesthetic, epitomised in the subjective panoramas, sweeping historical, mythological, literary perspectives and aesthetic acrobatics of *Under The Eildon Tree*, Goodsir Smith's most masterful harmonisation of those academic components identified by MacDiarmid above (though the list could be longer) along with all the vagaries of his own character and diverse, more experimental inclinations.

More immediately, *Skail Wind* contains the seeds of a progression towards a simultaneous de-bunking and intensification of Goodsir Smith's awareness of his own self-awareness of his own self-awareness: this may sound self-*obsessive* rather, but he succeeds in translating that vision to the aggressively objective, the mind's more surrealistic or symbolic vagaries for instance set squarely in the context of the very real world, functioning in a multi-faceted process of mutual elucidation.

## 5

Although a topic already partially elaborated something more should be said of the underlying structural logic in this book. One way of further broaching this issue is to begin by considering the structural principles of an individual poem. 'Lament in the Second Winter of War' for instance, is divided into three uneven stanzas. The first is set in long, sporadically rhymed lines and concerns emotional disquiet explored through a series of subjective images, symbols and analogies. The second longer stanza set in lines proportionate to the first, presents an extrinsic mirroring of that subjective disquiet. In expansive anthropomorphism, (a technique to which Goodsir Smith will return and augment), Edinburgh is portrayed in anatomical terms:

Auld Embro's bluid is thin, the bars 're toom  
An cauld is her fierce iren hert, her black banes  
Rigid wi cauld, the bluid's fell thin aneth the snaw.

(S.W. p. 9)

Anthropomorphism is a mode often prone to sentimentality and whimsy, but here the context, that of an impoverished Edinburgh whose

people, synonymous with the city's life 'bluid', have been siphoned off to quench 'the drouthy lech o war', (S.W. p. 9) in conjunction with the anatomical directness of the description supersedes this propensity. The last stanza cuts to much shorter line lengths and to a direct statement of conclusion derived from preceding reflections. Set in more fricative, alliterative Scots, this consists of an address to 'my dochter daith' (S.W. p. 9), comprising a belligerent refusal to be cowed in the face of the menace implicit in the two stanzas preceding:

Nor wull ye wud me then, my dochter daith,  
 Nor creep me tae my crepuscule wi dowie dule:  
 Na, na my queen; ye'll hae to bide a ween,  
 I've vengeance yet tae verse afore ye ding thir een.

(S.W. p. 9)

Basically then we find Goodsir Smith employing long lines and elaborate syntax for more speculative, illustrative or exploratory passages, then switching to a more condensed format for direct statement. Such an overall and in many ways clear cut movement can also be perceived in the structuring of the collection as a whole. The bleak and largely pessimistic sonnets, 'The Last Dusk' and 'A Day Apart' set in syntactically complex English are balanced by intensified use of Scots and flashes of optimism in other poems such as the address to death in the 'Lament' poem discussed above. The scenario remains dark however, moving through the bleak perspectives of 'Kinnoul Hill' and 'Hornie wi the Green Ee' to the dense, oppressive 'Ode to Hector Berlioz', which nonetheless still manages to suggest hope in the 'outlan's' deviant vision.

There are sharper contrasts however, notably in 'Song: The Dark Days are by', which provides a distinct alleviation in its direct expression of optimism:

O the glory's uprising, my luve, my luve,  
 Ye can hear Scotlan's hert pulsing fierce wi the Spring,

(S.W. p. 34)

This poem, set in simple lyric form, is the more striking coming hard on the heels of the bleak and more ambivalent conclusion of the 'Berlioz' poem: 'I sit hunched, cauld i the gaitherin nicht, / sit sans hope, belief

ir ony clue; / I last an secret o the makars, raggit and fearfu, kenning  
owre weel poor / Orpheus' doom'. (S.W. p. 30).

Goodsir Smith was a supporter, though never a member, of the Scottish National Party, seeing in it latent potential to supersede, even if only in a limited fashion, an oppression he perceived as international in character. In this respect 'The Dark Days are by' can be seen as an indication of the sense of optimism which Goodsir Smith found symbolised by that party and indeed in more general terms, in Scotland and its people's potential. Similarly the linguistic vagaries of *Skail Wind*, in clipped terms, a transitional point charting his course away from English and on to more experimental works in Scots, can be seen as a textual embodiment and testimony on Goodsir Smith's fundamental political and aesthetic convictions while functioning as an integral structural tactic firmly underlining and reinforcing socio-political aspects of the book's thematic development.

The rhapsodic tones of 'The Quickening' poems too, mark a further shift in mood, notably in their use of colours (a surprisingly prevalent component of this book, though perhaps not so surprising in a, at this time, thwarted painter). From pervasive blacks and greys, threatening red, depressive browns in the opening poems, there is an increasing dominance of green and blue, emblematic here primarily of awakening and vigour in life. Attendant to this there is the welcome incumbency of humour in 'Song: The Steeple Bar, Perth': although the darker side of Goodsir Smith can be traced in virtually all of his work, this collection is probably, overall, his most foreboding and gloomy. Lines such as these then, if still pretty stark in themselves provide a very welcome if clearly calculated levity:

O I'm gettin a wee thing fou, my luve,  
An donnert an like tae fleer-  
For, jeez, it's dreich tae get pissed, my luve,  
Wi' nane o my looed yins here.

(S.W. p. 49)

The situation here may be the same but by this stage the poem's persona, and Goodsir Smith is already a character in his own work, has developed a level of detachment and the ability to view his situation with humorous self-depreciation which indicates a positive response to and adaptation to circumstances otherwise deadening. (Therein lies the

necessity of recognising the polarities, good and evil walking hand in hand).

The last poems here compound this sense of affirmance. The 'Epistle to John Guthrie' is a direct and vigorous defence of the use of Scots, 'We've come intil a gey queer time / Whan scribevan Scots is near a crime', (S.W. p. 50). The retention of Scots in literary terms alone can be seen as integral to the retention of a sense of Scottish national identity, integral, as Goodsir Smith and many of his contemporaries recognised, if Scotland was ever to fully realise its potential.

Such aspects are dealt with most explicitly in 'The Refugees: A Complaynt', a poem which although veering towards the melodramatic does still yield emotional veracity and sincerity, anger too comes through the poem's dense linguistic and syntactic web. The poem parallels the refugees of World War Two, spread over Europe here like insects, with the refugees of the Highland clearances. The poem is a statement of solidarity with the world's oppressed, who live 'hoping return will see a room / Not bricks piled on anither's tomb.' (S.W. p. 56).

Goodsir Smith abhorred all forms of oppression, be it Nazi, Fascist, South African or English, and he saw it quite simply as a part of the poet's role and function in society to stand firm with and to speak for the oppressed of all nations as a natural ally: 'They are the same I say what tongues they clack, they are the same-' (S.W. p. 56). The role he assumed, even at this early stage is essentially that of kindred spirit:

Ah God whit is this blethers tae the waefu stound it draws  
     frae,  
 God whit can a poet chiel whaes words are fleered  
 Whaes haill existence is the outlin's, clung tae's cliff  
 Wheer fell winds pluck him, rave his limbs desiring *his* daith  
     too,  
 Whit can he dae save cry this sabbins coronach agin the  
 gastrous  
     stour?

(S.W. p. 56)

The poem concludes with recognition of the ongoing confrontation, the prevalence of injustice; however, instead of the pessimism of the book's opening poems, the ending of 'The Refugees: A Complaynt' expresses commitment to continue to live and strive to supersede oppression in all its forms:

Here my complaynt is done  
And ken I fine its aiblins jist begun.

(S.W. p. 56)

Ominous words for November 1940.

*Skail Wind* then although appearing at first as a loose, eclectic gathering of disparate poems can suggest an underlying unity of structure, form and content, significant in itself, this is also an early indicator of Goodsir Smith's interest in longer and potentially more dynamic forms, soon to become apparent in subsequent work; such aspects also provide useful pointers to some of the technical and thematic concerns with which this work will concern itself.

With these remarks in mind, a number of explicit references to the poet's role suggest a concluding area of importance which should be discussed before moving on to later material. Goodsir Smith's concern with the poet or artist's role, function or even validity in contemporary society is a central and pervasive concern in much of his work and it is central to two poems in this collection which I have not looked at in any particular depth: as with so much of the material here these poems send out noisy signals of the nature of things to come.

The poems are 'The Samphire Gatherers' and the 'Ode to Hector Berlioz'. Goodsir Smith saw the artist very much as the outsider (with inside knowledge), the Outlan, and Berlioz is a clear candidate for his attention. A composer of psychotic intensity in terms both of his compositions and his personality, untrained as a musician and belligerently scorning tuition, he followed his own highly individual course. He was totally 'self-conscious' (or aware) of his artistic role, with his memoirs now regarded as among select examples purportedly exemplifying the artist's archetypal and far-famed and fabled paranoia. Berlioz, like Goodsir Smith, was fascinated by Auld Hornie, the devil, a further factor serving to draw the two together, in spirit if not in the flesh.

In the poem though Berlioz is portrayed with, 'Sich een that see owre faur aheid leching the glaistig's glaumerie,' (S.W. p. 30). Such an example illustrates Goodsir Smith's ideal view of the poet, artist, as visionary; capable of stepping beyond the shackles of society and constrained consciousness, the latter a consequence of the fouled nature of the former. For Goodsir Smith the artist, the poet, is hybrid, at once 'maister wizard', the conjuror of light as well as the outcast, vagrant, 'huddled crafty for sanctuary' (S.W. p. 30). He calls on Berlioz to, 'Assault oor bound wae



herts maze wildered weary o these tenebrous landscapes' (S.W. p. 30). Whether, like the consistently invoked Orpheus or Merlin, or like Burns or Berlioz (the mythological realms of Orpheus are synonymous zones to those more direct realities of Burns or Berlioz), each in their way is shown or portrayed as delving to the essences, the truths: the possessors of deviant magics, touching the real with 'magic hauns,' (S.W. p. 30)

In 'The Samphire Gatherers', the vagrant, the outlan is brought to the fore. Here, 'the last few crazy samphire gatherers' (S.W. p. 35) clinging precariously to the cliff edge under dark and stormy skies, lashed by winds amid the careering gulls, 'screichan lik sea trolls, vultures for carrion come' (S.W. p. 35) are paralleled with the poet, or any outlan. They are 'the searchin madmen' (S.W. p. 35). The tenacity of the gatherers and their participation in a trade deemed insane by normal society, sets them, like the poet, aside. And for Goodsir Smith this is the proper place, amid the tourbillion, synonymous with the strange realms (and trade) the poet must explore and exist within before unleashing the fruits of his own gatherings.

These are the beginnings then, prevalent themes and inclinations all to be dealt with in more sophisticated and elaborate forms in the two books which succeed *Skail Wind*, *The Wanderer and Other Poems* (1943) and *The Deevil's Waltz* (1946).

## CHAPTER TWO

### RIN AN ROUT<sup>1</sup>

#### 1

Although Goodsir Smith's marriage and the birth of his son Robin in 1942 (his daughter, Kitty, was born in 1944) along with the appearance of *Skail Wind* in 1941 brought an end to the chaos of his life in the 30s and brought a welcome step forward in establishing him at least as a 'published' poet, the progression of the Second World War brought a different set of problems, a new kind of chaos, ensuring that 'settling down', to write or anything else, was still a long way away.

With hindsight it is clear that by the mid 1930s the furore and impetus stirred up in the 1920s, with MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance, was on the wane. MacDiarmid's influence and example, by the early 1940s, was only tentatively beginning to filter through to the younger writers who were to become the vanguard of what has come to be known as the 'second wave' of the Scottish Renaissance in the post-war years. More immediately, with MacDiarmid effectively isolated in the Shetland Islands, on Whalsay (however vigorous his efforts as a correspondent to circumvent this), the buzz and hum he generated were sorely missed. No less the vigorous polemic as well as the platform for new writing he provided in the periodicals he edited: *The Scottish Chapbook* (1922-1923), *The Scottish Nation* (1923) and *The Northern Review* (1924) were all long gone. His *The Voice of Scotland* made a brief appearance in 1938-1939 only to be rapidly shelved by the perceived exigencies of the onset of war.<sup>2</sup> If in the 1990s we take a look at the acknowledgements to periodicals prefacing a new collection of poetry these may well run to half a page or more. If we look back to Goodsir Smith's *The Wanderer and Other Poems* published in 1943 we find only the *Free Man* and the *Scots Socialist* along with the Chalmers Press (acknowledging material carried over from *Skail Wind*). Callum MacDonald, who was to become an important figure in Scottish publishing, did not take on *Lines Review* until 1952 (from the second issue).

This is essentially symptomatic of the times, if publishing Scottish poetry *before* the war was difficult enough, the coming of war-time shortages exacerbated the precarious position of periodicals and book publishers alike. This though was only the tip of an increasingly



damaging iceberg. For one thing the notion of a right-wing Scottish poet remains to this day virtually an antithetical concept. Given the volatile conditions of war-time and the attendant stirring up of 'British' patriotism the existence of a bunch of writers harbouring between them ardent left-wing, communist, Scottish nationalist, socialist republican (or maybe even worse *pacifist*) inclinations, many of whom furthermore insisted on writing in Scots about Scotland or about the nature of the war itself, was an even less palatable concoction than usual. Although Goodsir Smith's 'Epistle to John Guthrie' in *Skail Wind* (p. 50) was primarily a personal address to Guthrie and a discussion of the aesthetic merits of Scots, the political connotations underlying the book as a whole indicate that the lines: 'We've come intil a gey queer time / Whan Scriveran Scots is near a crime', are more than personal, more than aesthetic debate or polemic and no idle posture.

This political correlative however is one manifestation of many more serious problems confronting Scottish writers (along with everyone else) which were more pressing than the practicalities of publishing their work. The symbolic 'tourbillion' invoked by Goodsir Smith in 'The Samphire Gatherers' (S. W. p. 35) had become all too real for most of Europe and for many, whether to step in, whether to fight, raised questions which could not be comfortably resolved. Norman MacCaig for one refused to participate on ethical grounds, maintaining that killing people is not a good idea. This cost him ninety-three days in jail, 'bed and breakfast' as he recalls another inmate observing.<sup>3</sup> For MacCaig the rest of the war was spent with the Non Combatant Corps, being shunted around the country with various bodies trying to decide what they should be doing. George Campbell Hay too was a conscientious objector though after eight months 'on the run' he relented and joined up. Hay was posted in Africa where many another Scottish poet ended up; Sorley MacLean, Hamish Henderson, Robert Garioch and Edwin Morgan to name but a handful. The likes of MacLean and Henderson, although prepared to serve, remained deeply cynical about the war, its cost in human lives, the motivations of the British government (for one), only what they perceived as the unprecedented menace of Nazism and Fascism overturning reservations. Douglas Young on the other hand refused to participate on political grounds. As a Scottish Nationalist he debated the right of an English government to conscript him, as a consequence he too was imprisoned.

Goodsir Smith's views at this time were largely akin to those of MacLean and Henderson. Reflecting on the pre-war debate of such issues and subsequent events he wrote:

I remember just before the war broke out the long arguments that went on about whether a Nationalist should support the war or not. Douglas, of course, and George Campbell Hay and some others were for refusing conscription. I myself had sent my half-crown to join Donaldson's anti-Conscription League in 1938, but before 1939 I had recanted. Although I understood the line of Douglas and Hay, neither Hector MacIver nor I thought it realistic (in its true sense, not the political sense) for anyone who like ourselves had been pro-Republican Spain. Having howled against the Nazis and the Fascists for several years and then to refuse to fight them when the opportunity was offered seemed dishonest, at least to me. But I see now it was necessary for someone to take Douglas's line and I admire him and the others for doing so.<sup>4</sup>

Once more, as with his attempt to fight in Spain, Goodsir Smith's services were rejected by the 'Joint Recruitment Board' on grounds of ill-health. Unlike MacDiarmid however, who by 1942 was working in a Glasgow munitions factory, Goodsir Smith's 'talents' were employed for marginally more appropriate purposes. Goodsir Smith spent the early years of the war in Perthshire teaching English to Polish refugees, ironically attending to diverse dialects of Scots with which he was previously unfamiliar. By 1943 when *The Wanderer and Other Poems* appeared he had been transferred to Fife and had managed to find a cottage in Largo where he was joined by his family.

For all the disruptions and dislocations of war then Goodsir Smith was still writing – and making important advances at that. What may effectively be termed his war-time output subsequent to *Skail Wind*, *The Wanderer and Other Poems* (1943) and *The Deevil's Waltz* published in 1946 show him moving a long way beyond the sometimes uncomfortable stylistic and linguistic hybrids of the late 30s and early 40s, breaking new ground on diverse fronts.

## 2

The long title poem of the first of these books, 'The Wanderer', was conceived as a poem sequence in twelve cantos and develops many of the thematic strands prevalent in *Skail Wind*, notably the nature of the role of the poet or 'outlan' with regard to mainline society and how the former

interacts with the latter, and concomitantly, the nature and potential of poetry itself. The idea of the wanderer as a theme in poetry may well be as old as poetry itself. In Old English poetry for instance both 'The Wanderer' and 'The Seafarer' (see *Sweet's Anglo Saxon Reader*, p. 160 and p. 165 respectively) may be cited as early examples while in more recent times Shelley's 'Alastor' suggests a more relevant precedent to Goodsir Smith's utilisation of the theme.

In both Shelley's and Goodsir Smith's poems although the wanderer is ostensibly identified with a specific character (or characters) in broader terms such figures are employed to symbolise a pervasive, universal representation of a spirit of truth and freedom intrinsic to human nature if too often stifled by forces of oppression, surviving nonetheless down through the centuries.

With the Second World War in full swing, the threat posed by fascism as well as the threat to individual freedom imposed in Britain as a consequence of all out war, further complicated in Goodsir Smith's case by the uneasy union of Scotland and England, his choice of the wanderer as a central theme in this period does not seem too surprising. Aside from this however Goodsir Smith did have a strong romantic streak, which when unrestrained can tarnish the poetry, and he was forbye a great admirer of Shelley, both sharing the belief that the poet, for one, embodies, or should embody that pervasive spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Of the original twelve cantos only two, 'The Ballad of Peter Morrison' and 'Explicit Peter Morrison', were among the five pieces from this book chosen for inclusion in the *Collected Poems*, effectively mutilating the sequence. While say 'The Ballad of Peter Morrison' is certainly a good piece of writing in itself and can stand in isolation the selection gives no indication of either the ambitiousness of the project as a whole or of the stylistic and linguistic refinement which has taken place since the *Skail Wind* collection. To date, critical focus on the work from this period has centered mainly on the 'other poems' of this collection, particularly on 'Ma Moujik Lass'. Given the suggested underlying structural logic of the poems in *Skail Wind* and since Goodsir Smith's interest in longer poems or poem sequences as well as in drama proved a continuing concern throughout his life it is more important here to take a different tack and to take a closer look at the principles of arrangement and the thematic development of 'The Wanderer' itself.

The poem is a complex one, an elaborate matrix of intimately related strands comprising an elaborate cast of dramatis personae, poets and

outlaws, from the quasi-mythical Peter Morrison, to Villon, Wallace, Burns and Byron – among many others. As we are led from character to character their significant qualities, from a plain rebelliousness to political radicalism, are drawn out and incorporated in a dense intertexture of transformational symbolism, mutating and accumulating widening frames of reference as cross-references themselves steadily spiral. These components of the sequence gell in turn with a number of mutually elucidatory and coexistent strands of perspective; mythological, historical, contemporary, mythical and geographical.

In more directly technical terms too there are added complexities. Goodsir Smith utilises lyric and ballad forms in a rigorously modernist fragmentation of narrative while at the same time using those traditional forms as an allusive and parodic device enabling him to effectively shackle his romanticism, so turning a potential weakness to his advantage. Between Goodsir Smith's enthusiasm for both Shelley and Byron in conjunction with an equal, early, enthusiasm for T. S. Eliot, ingredients carefully blended here with Goodsir Smith's own idiosyncratic perspective, the result is a highly original and often startling aesthetic conjunction.

Lastly here, interwoven in this overall texture there is a discernible movement through the transformation of symbols to a more direct exemplification on to explication. An elaborate amalgam worth taking time here to examine more closely, for a tracing of this network not only illustrates Goodsir Smith's technical development and lays bare predominant inclinations but offers a foretaste and a foreground for *Under The Eildon Tree* for which in many respects 'The Wanderer' is virtually a structural template.

The opening poem, 'Prelude In Whilk's The Hail Burden', announces 'the note of assault': 'Warison', our introduction to the ghost voice of Peter Morrison, the first in the catalogue of Outlaws and outsiders, echoing on from beyond the grave (Goodsir Smith glosses 'mools' as 'dust of the dead'). This explicit invocation of protraction is developed in more elaborate symbolic terms, as the tenaciousness of a gull caught high in a storm is drawn in as a parallel:

Lane maw abune, a white targat  
Blawn i the reikan lyft,  
Ye fecht an warssle, hing i the tummlan blyte

(W. p. 6)

At a surface level the bird is singled out as a symbol simply for its tenacity and endurance in face of the storm, a symbolic parallel to the position of the poet, a comparison soon made explicit:

Yir fell sang scrauchs 'gin droukan wunds  
Throu gurl o faem thon oorie skreigh  
Defiant shills, the hert is reithe,  
Gull, ma burd, ma hert as thine is fou, is heich.

(W. p. 6)

Here too aside from the direct assertion of identification the defiance attributed to the bird's 'oorie skreigh' raises echoes of Morrison's equally defiant cry of assault and forges a tripartite conjunction and alliance between the bird, the 'bard' persona assumed by Goodsir Smith and with the outlaw Morrison.

The symbolic ramifications however soon become manifold as the transitions and potential cross-references escalate and Goodsir Smith incorporates socio-political as well as aesthetic dimensions. The gull is termed as 'Like tae this land', a symbol at once of Scottish potential and of its tenacity and survival. On a more abstract level Goodsir Smith also construes the gull as synonymous with 'The flean sangs in a makar's heid'; as in so many of the poems in *Skail Wind* the perspective flickers here, a more elaborate use of the cross-hatching of subjective-objective dualism discussed in Chapter One, with, in this instance, the objective phenomena of the gull, already laden with symbolic offshoots, further correlated to the subjective realm of the psychological processes of creativity, an aesthetic analog.

These metamorphic strands are drawn together with the poem's ending on a positive, assertive note, 'Ay, gallus burd, we heed-nor winna ken defeat.' The gull functions ultimately as a catalytic reminder, precipitating in those who look with open eyes an awareness of the worth and need for defiance, perseverance and inner strength. Implicit in the consistent identification of the bird with both the poet's role and his art is the assertion that poet and poem alike should function in an equally catalytic fashion, similarly too, should the catalysis take, Scotland itself could assume an equally catalytic function in the international context, an existential chain reaction.

From the (occasionally too) dense and shifting symbolism of canto one Goodsir Smith moves focus in canto two, 'The Ballad of Peter Morrison', to an illustration of the qualities associated with the gull enacted in a

more tangible context, exemplified in the 'gangrel' Peter Morrison. The poem relates Morrison's tale, an archetypal 'outlan', the sole survivor of a ship-wreck when young who is as a consequence jolted to a dubious awareness and sense of detachment:<sup>6</sup>

He got tae be an enemy  
O' Gode an his chosen earthly few-  
O' Gode for the wraik, and Authority  
Used bi men sans ruth nor loe.

(W. p. 7)

An explicit rejection of the values cherished by respectable society, like the gull of canto one, Morrison 'winna bide nor sleep,' (W. p. 6). The immediacy of the ballad format and the directness of the language here enables Goodsir Smith to bring the outlan theme explicitly to the fore and to place it firmly in a context easier to relate and respond to after the more esoteric and allusive canto one. The various qualities invoked with regard to the gull are further illustrated in human terms as Morrison's rebellious lifestyle, drinker, poacher and iconoclast is described. Morrison effectively provides an extrinsic human parallel and manifestation of the symbolic qualities of the gull; self-sufficient, independent, wreckless, a loner with pride in himself and defiance enough to speak his mind.

There are other significant aspects of transformational symbolism here. As we saw with regard to *Skail Wind*, landscape is an important factor in Goodsir Smith's work and this is no less so in 'The Wanderer'. In *Skail Wind* landscape is used to evoke and elaborate subjective states, here however, bleak and barren landscapes and weather conditions are employed as correlatives of a 'wrongness' in society and in consciousness. The storm which envelops the gull signifies the manifestation of the world's 'tourbillion', a condensed metaphor for the consequences of the uncaring rule and power of the 'Mongers', the hypocrisy and quiescence of the church, the complacency of those who ignore or are prepared to embrace these forces. That 'tourbillion' finds an echo here in the miserable scenario surrounding the wreck and into which Morrison is effectively born, turning his life into one of perpetual challenge:

Driven alang throu aa the nicht  
Snell wi tempest; wund an rain



Droukit the thrang o weemin traikt  
 Frae beach tae beach wi prayers for their men.

(W. p. 7)

Such lines illustrate a pervasive symbolic paradox running throughout this poem, attendant to the central transformations, for although 'The Ballad of Peter Morrison' closes on an ostensibly negative note with the skalrag's death, blind drunk 'wi his heid in a burn', positive factors survive implicitly in that it is from such a dank and dark scenario that Morrison emerged to sing his 'rebelly sang', just as, equally paradoxically, the storm of canto one draws out the strongest qualities in the gull.<sup>7</sup>

The third canto, 'Lament In The Second Winter Of War', has been brought forward from *Skail Wind*. Here the poem is rigidly recontextualised and is thematically pertinent in that it marks a shift to a contemporary perspective, from the primarily quasi-mythical perspective of canto two, and draws our awareness of 'the poet' himself closer to the fore by incorporating his own immediate settings and attitudes (throughout this collection there is an interesting balance between a fictive, bardic persona and overtly biographical allusions). Here he explicitly identifies himself as 'left alane', as 'the gangrel – the skalrag' (W. p. 8), refusing to turn to complacency and sleep in face of 'oorie truth' but to make a noise about it as 'The Wanderer' himself, 'I've vengeance yet tae verse afore ye ding thir een': again on a more personal level this reiterates belief in poetry as potentially catalytic.

This expansion of the broad perspectives in which Goodsir Smith's ideas are set and explored is also functional in thematic terms. Here, allusions to the Second World War suggests that since the distant if unspecified time of Morrison nothing has really changed, equally though that his outlan spirit survives in us in the face of asperity; an extension of the paradoxical emergence of Morrison from the storm in canto two.

Another outlaw is drawn in with the fourth canto, 'Ishmael O The Nations and A Nation O Ishmaels', a typically allusive title reinforcing central assertions of an individual's responsibility for the condition of the society he lives in. (There is a good deal of prototypical existentialism in this work.<sup>8</sup>) The body of this poem though focuses on the 'wandering' spirit of Morrison, bedraggled and adrift once more in a desolate scenario both urban-industrial and rural-agrarian:



Tae nane wull speak o the skaith in his hert,  
 Ainlie waunders wi yon fell stare amang  
 The dourest screes o aa the land an the puir deserted  
     streets;  
 Ye'll see him amang the reidnan yairds rusting tae  
     gastrous monuments  
 As weel as on the barren fremed muirs  
 Whaur English lordies sport an whaup tirls waefu maen,  
 I' the deid touns whaur the wayf yins staun, victims o a  
     dreichlie ploy,  
 Or the gray strans wi the rottening hulks, black as the  
     antient daith.

(W. p. 10)

Such a black scenario again reinforces the pervasive images of a crippled society and the dearth of real consciousness; there is no extraneous help on hand, 'God'is laid out, careless, only a grunt on the wind, 'A belch o God as sleepan he turns.'(W. p. 9). This canto too ends pessimistically though it is important in broadening the overall movement of the sequence. The malaise soiling individual and nation alike is expanded here to encompass the international as Morrison turns in vain to look to all points of the compass for hope and shelter. Potential too though is shown as international, for all that the waste land scenario is prevalent the spirit personified in Morrison is present yet in the 'wayf yins' and capable of arousal. Paradoxically, once more, the war itself is seen as a potentially catalytic factor: 'till war wull mak him worthy, ay o muckle worth,'(W. p. 10). That irony though is double edged, governments too in times of war also suddenly find that people can be 'o muckle worth', a further extension of the ongoing transition of symbols and accrual of potential tangents.

'The Een O Wallace Glower Yet Frae The Spear On London Brig', canto five, recruits Wallace to the outlaw elite and he too is presented in the midst of his own particular species of the negating forces at loose in the world and is held up as an example:

Bauld lik Wallace staun  
 Sterk upo yir darklin craig  
 Brou naked tae the tourbillon

(W. p. 11)

This is a developed example of Goodsir Smith's fondness for representative objectification of, what in this case could be termed psychological phenomena. In this poem Wallace is employed to represent a timeless if savaged subjective presence, just as Morrison's spirit is asserted as omnipresent in the preceding canto, each in turn codifying different aspects of intrinsic human components.

This poem also marks a shift in tone, it is much more direct, almost didactic at times:

Gangrel, hap yir dule aneath the breengan gleid  
 That glenters wud wi arrogance i midnicht's dumbest  
     deid,  
 But hain, aye hain yir vision, wayf; nocht else wull  
     smore yir fear  
 Whan glaistigs gowl atour yir saul an bogles flyte an fleer,  
 Whan luv flees oot tae Hornie's howe  
 O' rauk an drublie lees,  
 An truth lik simmer flouers is wede awa -

(W. p. 11)

Idealism and truth are part of the 'vision' the 'fantice' to which like Wallace we must hold and preserve when faced by adversity, essentially a sustaining belief in the qualities personified by the outlaw cast, a belief in self and potential, the possibility of making better worlds. The weaving in of the machinations of the supernatural here (paralleling the storm, the tourbillion) adding a further strand to the overall patterning, is interesting too. While illustrating Goodsir Smith's progression and offering a distinctive foretaste of the work soon to come with *The Deevil's Waltz*, this also suggests an expansion of perspective, in this case literary-historical, drawing on the long tradition of the use of the supernatural in Scottish literature. Overall a text based broadening of scope building on central transitions of both scenario and the linguistic and thematic patterning.

Although the lines cited above are bleak the overall atmosphere here is one of optimism, envisaging a time 'Whan healed be ilka sair, an free the bairn that's born!' Love too is presented not only as a surviving factor but one which also serves to sustain, a symbolic adjunct of 'the fantice':

Feed nou wi loo yir fantasie in hert's deep drouthie lynn;

For neer his skaith wull sleep till Scotland staunch her  
greit

I' the outcome o man's traik whan luv and justice meet.

(W. p. 12)

With the incorporation of Wallace a further strand is woven into the span of historical perspective and by this stage in the sequence a balancing act between optimism and pessimism is apparent. This gells with the central premises in this area, that nothing changes: the poems' shifts of mood, tone, expectation effectively mirrored in the waves of history in its movements from periods of repression and dormancy to periods of hope and awakening.

In many respects though canto five sees the end of the balancing act and the sixth canto 'The Pass In The Hills' marks the initiation of a new mood of assertiveness and a prevalence of optimism. Central in many ways, the sequence's mid-point, picking up a strand in the weave with the 'Warison' refrain from canto one, a fragmented refrain reinforcing the pervasive if threatened universal spirit mimetically in the text, while also featuring an explicit run-down of the central themes. In this respect its position structurally emphasises its content:

This is the turn, ken it weel,  
Nou we're come tae the pass i the hills  
Wi a gey lang traik baith fore and back;  
The wunds frae ilka airt blaw here,

(W. p. 13)

Goodsir Smith's endeavour to establish structural harmony is overtly laid bare here, a harmony in itself intended to reinforce the poem's overall optimism and assertive stance, equally almost a ceremony of healing in a celebration of unity. These lines are also premonitory in that they provide an early example of Goodsir Smith taking a side-swipe at himself, self-consciously mocking his own aspirations; a tactic he will develop to considerable effect in work to come. Paradoxically though this canto is also a lament for the disintegration of a wholeness that was once Scotland's: 'a nation haill wi her hert an ingyne / Ends an ingangs aa' (W. p. 12), and *that* so easily bought, 'Wi a pickle o lees an promises fause' (W. p. 12).

The balance shifts here though, if the 'deid touns' are still in evidence wreathed in images of impotency, change is perceived and portrayed as

imminent, as 'the nicht o decision' (W. p. 13), enacted here in a symbolic rising of the great dead, a rebirth of that universal spirit:

A mighty thrang frae the fowthy mools  
 Black wi rebelly men the hills  
 An rife the sleepan streets!  
 The caa's tae us aa outlan getts.

(W. p. 14)

This ending on a highly positive note sees the potential resurgence of the valuable qualities listed and examined through the transforming symbols attendant to the various outlaw guises in the preceding cantos, essentially latent capacities in our Selves, native to consciousness.

A geographical perspective is drawn to the fore in the seventh canto, 'Salute Tae The Russian Heroes, Winter '41', supplementing the diverse personae and the broad historical perspective while serving to underline the international significance of central themes. Goodsir Smith compares the hard pressed Russians of 1941 fighting to preserve what he terms 'a dream tae mend the skaiths o man' (W. p. 15), with the contemporary position in Scotland, still oppressed but ready to rise in the spirit of 1917, 'Ye'll be the first tae handsel Scotland freed.' (W. p. 15).

This raises problems in terms of the shifts taking place in contemporary ideology and events, particularly from the position c.1990 and, although thematically pertinent, there are other more immediate problems in this section. A brief catalogue of Russia's own outlans is provided as parallels to Scotland's; Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Pushkin, Blok, Gorki and Mayakovsky. Fair enough so far as this goes given the context. Goodsir Smith though goes on to portray this disparate gathering as shining, 'Like captains roun the brichtest bleeze o Lenin' (W. p. 15). The passage of time has much to do with the failure of this image, it is hard in the 90s to relate to the kind of idealism generated by the perceived situation in Russia at that time and it should be noted that Goodsir Smith's own attitude to the activities of the Soviet regime became one of disgust and disillusion.<sup>9</sup> The 'reid dawn' may still provide an *image* of hope and freedom but contemporary Russia, let alone what has now emerged of the post-war years there ensures that what was the U.S.S.R. no longer carries conviction of its embodiment.

This said though it is still insufficient defence for some of the writing here. The cliched portrayal of Russia as 'hame o mighty men

/ O' muckle heroes, land oor dreams pursue wi loosum / hope,'(W. p. 14), and embarrassingly, as 'a land / O' furs an vodka, dowie sangs an rairan gleids' (W. p. 14), reeks of adolescent excess and seems excruciatingly naive, on this occasion an example of Goodsir Smith's normally controlled romanticism becoming unbridled (though he is by no means alone in this respect, Sorley MacLean for one displays similar inclinations in some of his work).

'Odin's Boat or The One And The Many' the eighth canto in the sequence marks a return to the overall form. The central symbol is the pilot of Odin's boat, a mythological counterpart to the diverse outlan personae dealt with in preceding cantos, a further dimension to an already multiplex perspective:

The gangrel-pilot lashed to a yolleran wheel  
Strains aye tae glimpse throu the drifting rak  
The antrin licht he seeks, oh seeks -

(W. p. 16)

This sees a tying-off of various strands in the poem as a whole, conjoining the themes of outlan as both vision seeker and keeper amid the tourbillion while compounding, as well as further extending, the interplay of image and symbol. Here the malaise is 'athort the mapamound' as the 'lowe-swept poxy crust' (W. p. 15), and as a 'skuggy bidan pit o famine, pestilence, an fear' (W. p. 15). These images are developed in paralleled forms. As an adjunct to the mythological scenario there are the 'ocean-kelpie', 'owermichty trolls', 'demon-warders' with, 'their screichan airms, threats curled lik fangs / Mous bilan white atween the jagged anvils / Deep whaur the thoosan wud yins dern' (W. p. 16). These menacing images of storm and deep, echoing the similar scenarios of cantos one and two, symbolising the pervasive tourbillion, are paralleled by contemporary images of the grind of war in an effective refrain:

In ilka field the deid-watch beetles chack,  
Rusting metal and polished banes they lea i their track.

(W. p. 15)

Whether storm-battered pilot or battle-torn soldier, these are the symbolic (or not so in the latter case) realms, amid which, 'ilka gangrel aye maun quest his stern' (W. p. 16).

Further correlations to earlier cantos are also apparent, the gull of canto one is recalled, as the pilot, like Wallace or Morrison, is shown as an image and symbol of hope:

Yet ae swift bark scoves crested heich and awa  
 Lithe an swith on the mad rambaleugh swaw  
 Wi white gull-wings the boat of Odin flees throu spume  
 an freith

(W. p. 16)

This canto marks an escalation in the accumulation of images and symbols linking various strands and laying the ground work for increasingly direct statement.

Canto nine, 'The Weird O Scotland Is The Makar's Too' (another poem carried over from *Skail Wind*) continues this process, cutting to first person reflections of the bard as he considers his own situation as integral to the overall context, defining his own role and stance as an outlan. Although set in the first person 'the bard' is very much a persona, adopted as an integral symbolic component intended to supplement and develop the immediacy and scope of the poem as a whole. Accordingly the canto sees a clustering of many of the ideas dealt with allusively in preceding cantos surfacing in more direct expression. Centered on confrontation of a momentary doubt, an inclination to lapse into quiescence, the poem is riddled with echoes from preceding cantos. Bird images pervade: 'looping swallow burds / That scythe the midnight air lik munes,' (W. p. 17) echoing and duplicating significances established with the gull of canto one and systematically developed by cumulative co-reference to the diverse personae.

Here too 'the fantice' is central in countermanding the nagging doubt, again essentially idealism and belief in a different order: 'The fouth o dreams a gangrel has / Gin he's tae fleer the whups o wreithan storm' (W. p. 17). The 'storm' itself comes imbued with resonances of the turmoil and chaos of the world, explicitly here to be confronted if anything is to change. In some respects though, as an individual component, this poem is less interesting simply because it is so direct. A reservation in some degree applicable to each of these concluding cantos (nine-twelve). Thematically and contextually they mark a carefully cultivated culmination, though, having surfaced through the weave of symbolism and complex allusion they can seem weaker and overtly didactic in their explicit statement by comparison to the earlier and more opaque cantos.

That directness is equally apparent in 'Pushkin And The Rebel Bards Rampage At Kenmore', which recruits 'Pushkin' to the outlan ranks as a further example of tenacity and endurance. Here enacted in face of the mendacity and hypocrisy of Nicholas' regime. The example set by now familiar as the process of consolidation unfolds:

But yet yon skalrag pride ye haudit free  
And sae maun we i the thralls o ootward puer

(W. p. 18)

If this canto is thematically explicit, it is also much more politically explicit, bringing the full implications of the tourbillion sharply into contemporary focus, contempt for 'the pouers that be' is scathing:

Theyre ower free wi lolly smiles  
But traist the lips o a Leith Street trull  
She'll haud her aith mair nor the Mongers wull

(W. p. 19)

The historic perspective and international significances are retained in the parallels with Pushkin's situation, but the specific contemporary situation is left in no doubt:

The canny suddron ploys like corbies  
Plookit fleean hame tae roost, youll see  
Whan Scotlan's Lyon upwaukit rairs,  
Crouned wi a starn o reid!

(W. p. 20)

More pertinent to the poem as a whole, however, is the route to the realisation of this vision. 'Wandering' beneath a moon 'lik a birsan dug couched 'gin raivenan wunds' (W. p. 19), the bard dreams of the outlan rising pre-figured in canto six, effectively an aspect of our narrator's own 'fantice' as well as that, given the contemporary perspective on the war, of Goodsir Smith himself:

I wiss the storm-wings happin Pushkin's weird, his gallus  
brou,  
Rasch Byron's i the wunds' black mou



An Rabbie fleean heich nae tourbillion cud daunton,  
 Ay, an ilka rebelly bard's abune;  
 Peter Morrison newlie come is mang his trusty fieres  
 For ilka skalrag's oot the nicht  
 Rampagan i the mirk demented brak  
 The daft an bricht an raucle yins-  
 Hear Lermontov an Lorca theer  
 Rimbaud, Villon, Hoelderlin,  
 Theyre flytan wi the fuddrie's eagle beak  
 They rabble i the thunner's crack.

(W. p. 19)

This sees a compacting of the diverse perspectives Goodsir Smith provides, encompassing the historical, mythical, mythological, geographical and contemporary. Hard on the heels of this final massing of the outlans, their intrinsic value and broader significance is made explicit:

Gangrels, makars, subjugated lanns,  
 My Scotland-aa yir weirds are ane;  
 Ay, chiel, theyre aa the same  
     For place ye've nane  
 I' the schemes o the baggit men.

(W. p. 20)

This ties together the various levels, from individual to international, the outlan need not be a poet, but the poet to be of worth must be an outlaw. It is the realisation of that capacity, that quality, and the will to exercise it aroused in every individual which constitutes the only viable path to the fulfillment of potential which in turn can lead to the restructuring of society, the enactment of the 'fantice':

But ilk tae's ain fell strauchle, freedom, gins at hame,  
 And ae success tae ilka thrall is gain  
 A beacon-gleid o hope! -And even failyure whiles,  
 -As oors. In this fecht ilk's alane, but nane is lane.

(W. p. 20)

Canto eleven sees the culmination of the sequence in direct expression of the statement to which the poem as a whole is designed to explore,

explicate and demonstrate, the title itself 'Oorsels Alane' encapsulates the essence of that statement. This is at once the final condemnation of quiescence and the ultimate incitement to rise, for each to give reign to the outlan spirit, latent, however crushed and torn. The 'douce acceptance' (W. p. 21), which 'grows a miser Monger cleft tae deifness' (W. p. 21), is ridiculed as a 'corrupt kiss', a more original and forceful way of expressing the more familiar phrase. That such abdication of responsibility is a fundamental evil (not too strong a term in this intrinsically romantic context), and enemy to the aspirations of man, is emphasised in an expansion of the supernatural, mythologically orientated imagery and, in the cutting tone:

White Cloutie's fees, ma fieres.  
 Ye've paid them fine for years,  
 Soukit bricht his hoofs, ma dears

(W. pp. 21-22)

The canto concludes with a specific annunciation of the poem's central tenet, 'O rise, ye thralls, mak freedom real / oorsels alain, / oorsels alain!' (W. p. 22).

Canto twelve, 'Explicit Peter Morrison' is, as the title states, explicit:

Peter, ye bard, ye gangrel, king i yir clouts  
 As a gangrel aye shud be,  
 Ye haud the ainlie truth o the proud,  
 Man's need for libertie.

Ye're ilka conquest, Alba; as bard is ilka man  
 Ootcast, or burdened, or in chains,  
 Baith maun hain a raucle lear,  
 Baith strauchle alane.

Ye didna dee i the burn yon nicht  
 For aye yir legend stands,  
 The truth that fired yir rebelly hert  
 Is dirlan through the land.

(W. p. 22)

These lines are direct enough, their implications prepared in the preceding eleven cantos which provide the framework from which this

last statement is derived. The poem ends as it began with the 'Warison' refrain, so closing the cycle. A paradoxical ending, at once illustrative of potential harmonies while suggesting too that the position remains the same, the potential in each of us yet to be realised.

Overall 'The Wanderer' is a much more ambitious piece of writing than anything in *Skail Wind* and, with the exception of the dubious canto seven, much more skilfully executed, similarly there are fewer traces of incongruity in conjunctions of Scots vocabulary coupled with English diction. There are nonetheless several reservations which must be made. Canto seven, although an isolated failure is still a major flaw in the overall texture of the work, seriously disrupting the poem's central movements. Similarly the often unrestrained idealism and overtly romantic overview of the poet as outsider have worn badly with the years. Ours is perhaps a more cynical age, with aesthetic coldness generally viewed as a virtue, romanticism, even perhaps as here, effectively de- and re-contextualised, whatever its objectives, frowned upon. Nonetheless it could be argued that such an idealistic and romantic viewpoint is a symptomatic and potentially constructive response to a world situation in which cynicism is the *prevalent* reaction.

In his article 'Scottish Poetry in the Forties' Maurice Lindsay, speculating on the effects of the wartime situation on Scottish poets writes:

Out of these conditions and under such circumstances, emerged two 'movements'; Apocalypticism, and a revival of the literary power of Scottish Nationalism. Both were attempts to counter the impersonal realities of the wartime situation with personalised romanticism.<sup>10</sup>

In 'The Wanderer' there are certainly 'apocalyptic' strands and a good deal of Nationalist politics, while the overall impression of the poem could well be termed 'personalised romanticism'. This is a debatable phrase and implicitly and inappropriately denigratory in this instance, given that the whole poem is concerned with the confrontation of such factors as the 'impersonalised realities' epitomised by World War Two, rather than with any mode of escape or reconciliation. More aptly, and this is implicit in Lindsay's observation, 'personalised romanticism' is synonymous with the 'fantice' of 'The Wanderer', a way of sustaining hope in one's self and in the world.

Of the 'other poems' in *The Wanderer*, several are included in Goodsir Smith's next collection, *The Deevil's Waltz* (1946) and their most distinctive features characterise much of the work in that book, developments which can be discussed more fruitfully in that context.

### 3

*The Deevil's Waltz* is generally recognised as Goodsir Smith's first really significant, mature collection. This assessment was Goodsir Smith's own and it is reflected in the substantial selection from the book included in the *Collected Poems* of 1975. *The Deevil's Waltz* runs to over fifty poems and only a handful were excluded at the author's request, of these several were 'translations' from the work of Villon, Sorley MacLean and Ivan Jelinek. A number of these poems, notably 'The Widdreme' from the Gaelic of Sorley Maclean, were restored by the editors in the 'additional poems' section concluding the *Collected Poems*.

Although some of the poems in *The Deevil's Waltz* date as far back as 1939, that this is not intended simply as a disparate gathering of loose ends is signalled immediately by a quick glance at the contents index. As in the two preceding collections, overall principles of arrangement are a distinct concern. Here the poems are divided into three sections and even the titles of the poems in each section serve to indicate the nature of their basic concerns. Part One, 'Venus', centres on love, the death of love, the inner tensions involved; Part Two, 'Prometheus', is concerned with the socio-political, the threat to individualism in relation to the ascendancy (and corrupt nature) of 'the state', while Part Three, 'Mars', focuses on war as an ultimate manifestation of the fundamental ill-alignment of society, and concomitantly, individual consciousness.

These sections, although seeming distinct, are nonetheless intimately linked and a key to that linkage lies in the introductory poem preceding 'Venus', 'Prolegomenon: The Deevil's Waltz' (oddly juxtaposed to succeed the opening poems of 'Venus' in the *Collected Poems*).

'Prolegomenon' announces the various core themes to be explored in the succeeding three sections, as well as establishing the scenario in which the following poems are set. As always in Goodsir Smith's work, such provision of context is of central importance, here 'Prolegomenon' establishes tone and atmosphere designed to colour our reading of the subsequent poems, a technique employed in prototypical form in *Skail Wind*.

The poem itself is rhythmically relentless, reinforcing the content:

Rin an rout, rin an rout,  
 Mahoun gars us birl about,  
 He skirls his pipes, he stamps his heel  
 The globe spins wud in a haliket reel.

(D. W. p. 9)

The rhyme scheme here, AABB (not to mention subject matter), consciously echoes Burns' 'Tam o' Shanter', a quotation from which prefaces 'Prolegomenon' (Burns, along with Dunbar and Baudelaire among others, are background presences throughout the collection, each accruing symbolic significances as the poems develop, proffering a balance to those forces symbolised by Hornie).

Hornie's 'significance' is already apparent by the poem's second stanza:

Thare, the statesman's silken cheats,  
 Here, the bairnless mither greits,  
 Thare, a tyrant turns the screw,  
 Here, twa luvers' brokken vows.

(D. W. p. 9)

Such allusions and images of governmental oppression and exploitation, of sterility, mutilation and of corrupted love, of damage both physical and emotional, permeate the book as a whole, providing central themes developed and examined in greater detail in subsequent sections. Not only love is corrupted here, religion too is impotent and inefficacious in this scenario:

Jehovah snores, and Christ himsel  
 Lowps i the airms o Jezebel.

(D.W. . p. 9)

Even the angels, archetypal emblems of purity, are defiled and participate in the all pervasive carnage, the enjambment here creating an extra jolt to the central image:

He lauchs his lauch, the angels greit

Wi joy as they dine on carrion meat;

(D.W. p. 10)

The overall image is of hell on earth, metaphysical components, like those of the supernatural, are utilised to elaborate entirely corporeal concerns, a point made clear in the last stanza in an allusion to 'the rhythm o the Deil's jack-boot,' (D.W. p. 10), which correlates the hellish supernatural scenario to the war-torn reality of 1943, the date of the poem's composition.

In such a defiled reality, the individual is sorely pressed to survive:

Obey, obey; ye maunna spier!  
(Libertie's disjaskit lear!)  
While Cloutie pipes its crime tae think,  
– Its taxed e'en higher nor the drink!

(D.W. p. 10)

A central symbol of this all pervasive affliction is the wind cast up by the turmoil of the Deevil's waltz:

The dance is on, the waltz o hell,  
The wund frae its fleeen skirts is snell.

(D.W. p. 9)

That snell wind recurs in mutated forms and contexts throughout the collection carrying the detritus of the catalogue of defilements which constitute 'Prolegomenon'. In the face of that wind there are only 'A few damned feckless fanatics' who:

Yet try tae halt the dance o Styx  
Thrawn, throu the hellish orchestra  
They yall wi Baudelaire 'Je ne veux pas!'

(D.W. p. 9)

These 'fanatics' are Goodsir Smith's outlaws and wanderers, by now familiar figures in his work, symbolising intrinsic and potentially transcendent human essences; Burns, Baudelaire, Villon, Dunbar, like Peter Morrison before them, recurring as figureheads of rebellion, epitomising the survival of the fully human in a corrupting and corrupted world which would gladly see such qualities crushed.

'Prolegomenon' then gives some indication of the nature of the inter-connections which link the central themes of the three main sections of the collection. As in 'The Wanderer' there is a pervasive and constantly mutating complex of intimately interlocking symbol, image and theme. Prometheus is *the* outlaw in this collection, just as he is traditionally represented as the great benefactor of man, his legend employed as a protest against divine oppression (his animation of men of clay and his subsequent chaining to a rock explicitly correlating to various prison, stone and earth based images here), so too Goodsir Smith uses John MacLean to furnish us with a much more objective and immediate parallel to the symbolic, mythic Prometheus, projecting his central themes out onto the modern, contemporary world.

Equally significant and central are a catalogue of mutilations, Goodsir Smith's final touches to a hell on earth, the destructions working at every level of our being. Introspective skaiths are concomitant to the symbolic mutilations of Prometheus, to the actual dismemberment of Wallace, the more studied destruction of John MacLean, and on – to debacles such as the clearances and the fate of the Poles in the hands of the Nazis, further, to the rape of the land itself by industry and war. Symbolic and objective manifestations pinpoint the pervasive nature of the affliction, not only in international terms but striking inwards too, cutting to the roots of mankind's essences – belief in one's Self as an existentially positive entity, knowledge of that self in all its intricacy, knowledge of potential. *The Deevil's Waltz* is profoundly comprehensive in its scope, however dark its connotations may be, dealing with that reality is part, if not all, of the point. These elements constitute the obverse to Goodsir Smith's concept of transcendence, for only when the individual becomes fully awake will the concomitant freedom of nations become possible: for some that individuality cannot be reached in a subjugated nation, hence the value and role of the outlaw, consequently suppressions are directed at equivalent levels.

Similarly, although Goodsir Smith again employs the vocabulary of the supernatural, the poems' perspectives and implications are subjective in nature; these ghosts are aspects of Self and can be as frightening as any spectre. At the same time subjective perspectives are caught and mirrored in the objective world, in this case in the poems on John MacLean, developing directly from ideas generated in the series of stone related themes and images while the MacLean poems in turn gell with the Prometheus scenario. In effect cerebral monsters are paralleled by similar hauntings relating to much more objective



monstrosities illustrated by cross-reference to the contemporary socio-political scenario.

Bearing in mind the elements discussed above, we can move on to look at the poems and constituent sections in more detail, examining various ways in which these central ideas, themes and symbols are refined, developed and fused in the work as a whole.

In 'Venus', 'love' is the surface theme, but these are not simple love lyrics and entail complex ramifications deriving from the nature and importance of love and from the inner tensions and conflicts generated by love. Beneath that surface veneer, one of the most prevalent themes is the desire to escape from awareness, initially from the 'skaiths' of lost or thwarted loves, to seek 'Remeid frae luve's sair burdening.' ('Frae the French of Francois Villon', (D.W. p. 22). This aspect is made explicit in the poem 'Reflections in a Glass':

O neer the licht'll doiter doun,  
Ma luve, thares spate o gleid;  
I cam here til escape ma thochts  
– They thrang the mair; Och nane can flee  
The caunel burnan i the hert  
Whaes fuel's luve and langerie.

(D.W. p. 21)

Such introspective 'reflections' are elaborated in poems such as 'Reasoun an the Hert' and 'Reasoun Speaks at How-Dumb-Deid' in which the skaiths of love are interpreted in terms of the collision of passion and reason, once again techniques very much redolent of Goodsir Smith's earliest fascinations with the interplay of subjective and objective settings and themes. These elements constitute only an initial strategy leading into broader and darker subjective regions. These poems are illustrative of subjective functionings which admit of 'skaiths' outwith the realms of love, as for instance in 'Sang: The Birks in November' where darker connotations precipitated by 'Prolegomenon' come to the fore, the 'snell winds' rise up with the rumblings of war and blood:

Thae waesum leaves o gowd and reid  
Whit unco likeness hae  
Tae thochts aye dirlan throu ma heid  
That winna sleep an winna gae.

Alow the birks the Tay's aspate,  
 Her tummlan hert raxed ower strang,  
 The snell wunds lash Breadalbane brakes –  
 Ma saul's dung down bi an auld dreid sang.

O Aberfeldy's birks are aamaist bare  
 Wan-screichan tragic speirans tae the rain;  
 I ken twa mighty armies bleed i the Russian hayr  
 – But oh ma hert's black drumlie sang were gane!

(D.W. p. 15)

As we will see when we look at the 'Prometheus' section, such subjective skaiths are further developed by correlation to the images of mutilation already initiated in 'Prolegomenon'. At this stage Goodsir Smith is concerned with drawing us more deeply into the introspective scenario. This he does by incorporating various introspective symbols recalling the 'sombre beasts' of *Skail Wind*.

In such sequences, introspective perspectives are laden with threat, the potentially predatory nature of the complex subjective functionings, introduced with regard to love, are symbolised by the incorporation of the wolf as emblematic of the predatory capacities of introspection. So in 'The Scaur' where 'thochts rin free / Reid-wud lik wolves / Throu the bleezan-icy trees,' (D.W. p. 22). This predatory aspect is developed in conjunction with the central escape theme, as in 'The Scaur', where the subjective correlative is subsequently spelled out:

Shaw me the puir skirt-feifit fule  
 Ootrins the teeman scaur o luve,  
 Thocht deid, that niver dees.

(D.W. p. 22)

The use of 'ootrins' and 'teeman' emphasises, respectively, the desire to escape and the symbolism of the wolf in correlation to the pervasive and oppressive aspects of unwelcome awareness.

'The Scaur' codifies the wolf and its inclusion in later poems is proportionately less explicit, its implications carried over. In 'Frae the French o Francois Villon' the wolf appears as part of the backdrop:<sup>11</sup>

At this time, as I have tauld  
 Roun Christmas, the deid hin-enn

Whan wolves eat the wund an the cauld  
Hayr gars aa fowk keep ben  
Huddered roun the bleezan gleid,

(D.W. p. 22)

The associations established in 'The Scaur' are immediately picked up as the poem continues:

There cam on me a wull tae brak  
Frae the loosum jail I lang hae dreed,  
That aye ma hert does rack.

(D.W. p. 22)

The wolf makes a further appearance in the poem 'Can I Forget' the title emphasising the subjective aspects of the escape theme:

Can I forget the wolves' houl  
Famished rinnan throu the toun  
O' haar an wund an lamplicht?

(D.W. p. 26)

This poem again relocates emphasis, as in the 'Birks' poem, and moves from the 'love' aspects to incorporate other sources of the skaith's roots in objective phenomena by providing flickerings of the more prevalent socio-political correlatives to come:

Can I forget ma black wound?  
Kirkcudbright, may ye be dung doun  
An damned, Dundrennan too!

(D.W. p. 26)

This movement towards more tangible sources of oppressive awareness, the evils of war and social oppression, is signalled by the objective tactility of the wolf imagery, drawing us outward once more. That movement is enhanced by the use of prison-derived vocabulary, the use of 'jail' in the 'Villon' poem, or 'convict' in 'Spleen', (D.W. p. 19).

These harsh manifestations of oppression relate to the escape theme which pervades, while serving to lay preparatory ground for 'Prometheus', leading us more overtly into contemporary and objective realms, where



prison is a literal phenomenon as well as a pervasive symbol in diverse forms.

The themes and symbols discussed above are echoed and developed by their linkage to parallel strands of images related to smothering, being caged, drowned and buried which are derived primarily from multi-faceted, stone or earth-based themes. In 'In a Time of Deepest Wanhope' for instance:

I'll no can bide with my ain hert nae mair,  
 Frae oot this quaukan moss ma weird I'd free,  
 The play is duin, the girnan angels fleer;  
*Timor mortis non conturbat me.*

(D.W. p. 20)

Here the concept of being smothered and silenced by the oppressiveness of a too subjectively cramped reality is related strikingly to the escape theme. The poem is an ironic reworking of Dunbar's 'Lament for the Makaris', from which the 'timor mortis' refrain is derived. Here, that refrain is inverted by the addition of 'non', turning Dunbar's expression of Christian disquiet into an open atheistic embrace of death as a mode of release.

In an equally depressed scenario, we find in 'Sang : Tho It Droun Us Aa':

Oh tragic childe, ma hert for thee  
 Is dirlan ower reithe tae dree;  
 This luve's lik a mighty wund maun blaw,  
 It cannae drap – tho it droun us aa.

(D.W. p. 17)

The 'snell winds' of 'Prolegomenon' and its attendant hellish connotations, invoked via the love context, are portrayed as smothering, encompassing, inescapable forces. The allusion to drowning, the futility of attempts to escape are picked up again in 'Reflections in a Glass':

But aa the drink i the warld cannae droun  
 The desart atween ma thochts o you  
 That thraw ma saul wi lemanrie,  
 An ma toom airms o mockerie.

(D.W. p. 21)

The allusion to emptiness in that last line is correlated to stone and earth-based images, in 'Whan the Hert is Laich', we find 'A boulder's whare the hert shud be,' (D.W. p. 13), and in 'In a Time of Deepest Wanhope', 'Ma stane heid cracks wi thochts I cannae bear,' (D.W. p. 20). Connections continue to escalate, building up a complex network of association and allusion. From images of emptiness and death, Goodsir Smith moves on to incorporate compatible images of sterility, as in the 'bairnless mither' of 'Prolegomenon' which also alludes to the conscription of men into war. A further aspect of this thematic tangent ties in the incorporation of various ideas suggesting lack of nourishment, concomitant to ideas of imprisonment, suggestive of deprivation on both physiological and psychological levels. So, in 'Prolegomenon' the lovers 'get fur breid a chuckie-stane.' (D.W. p. 9), in 'Sang : The Bed o Stane', central to the stone theme, 'Aa turns til granite in ma mou,' (D.W. p. 16) and '... gravel is ma breid?' (D.W. p. 16).

Such connotations are paralleled by overt elaboration on themes related to emptiness, sterility, caging and smothering in passages such as those discussed in 'Prolegomenon' ('... its crime tae think') on the death of individualism and in expositions on loss of pride, of self-determination and self-esteem, essentially, *of Self*, swamped in the prevalence of negating forces.

Finally, the introspective symbolism of the wolf and the various stone-based images relate to various quasi-supernatural elements in *The Deevil's Waltz*. One of the most interesting poems illustrating this quality is 'The Widdreme'.<sup>12</sup> I use the term 'quasi' advisedly, for although the poem has a distinctly ethereal feel to it, reminiscent of some of the border ballads (as well as of Burns or Wordsworth's 'Lucy' poems), 'widdreme' is glossed as 'chaotic nightmare' and although the transportation of two lovers which takes place recalls many works with supernatural machinations (Poe too comes to mind), the scenario is emphatically that of the dreamworld, the poem's territory, psychological. As in 'The Wanderer', Goodsir Smith integrates diverse conventional forms, lyric, ballad and so on with rigorous modernist technique: the incorporation in each of these first three books of psychological strata functions in the same way. Conventional ingredients become components of the modernist mix, a distinctive feature of 'The Widdreme'.

The poem is ostensibly simple and concerns the dream of a lover whose love has been destroyed:

Ae nicht o thae twa year  
 Whan I thocht ma luve  
 Was strak wi a skaith as dure  
 As wumman's had sen Eve,

(D.W. p. 19)

In his dream, the lover is transposed to a happier more simple time,  
 from skaith to escape:

We ware thegither in a dwaum  
 By the stane dyke that stauns  
 Atween the loons' an lassies' yairds  
 O' ma first schuil.  
       Ma airms  
 Ware round her an ma lips  
 Seekan her mou

(D.W. p. 19)

The relief of the transposition is premature and is signalled by that  
 'stane dyke' with its associations of entrapment picked up from preceding  
 poems (pp.14-15), an immediate symbolic trigger:

– the laithlie gorgon's heid stuid up  
 On a sidden frae hint the waa,  
 An the lang mirk ugsome fingers graipt  
 Ma craig wi a sidden grup –

(D.W. p. 19)

This encapsulates many of the diverse strands of image and symbol  
 running throughout the book in a highly compacted form. The prison  
 walls slam down with a crash, the 'laithlie gorgon', synonymous with  
 the wolf, with the 'sombre beasts' of subjective realities and their  
 objective concomitants, also ties to the supernatural component, while  
 the invocation of Medusa provides a neat connection to, and extension  
 of, stone-related themes. The 'mirk ugsome fingers' gripping the throat  
 reinforces ideas on the predatory nature of introspection, supplemented  
 here by the overall dream scenario. The last lines of the poem, 'And then  
 the words of weirdless dule : / 'Owre blate, ye fuill!" (D.W. p. 19), mock  
 not only the simplicity of the dreamer and his dream, but man's naivety

in supposing the harsh nature of realities can be so easily eluded, while, at the same time, seeming to mock the poem and the poet themselves.

Paradoxically, Goodsir Smith is not attempting to elude realities but to confront them, a paradox attendant to the intrinsic nature of the introspective awareness which is the subject of the poem itself. While such awareness is both painful and oppressive, its confrontation is the route to transcendence, an idea already encountered in *The Wanderer*, the outlaw spirit survives and confronts.

Overall then, although the snell winds of 'Prolegomenon' run throughout in various forms and contexts (see pages 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 22 and 26 in this section), 'Venus' does end positively. Corrupted love, dead love or the thwarted loves which provide central bonding themes (these paralleled by corrupt or dead religion and the corruption of both state and individual) are superseded by loves that are happy and fruitful, as in the 'Five Blye Sangs for Marion', notably poem IV, 'I Loo Ma Luve in a Lamplit Bar':

An whan we're baith hauvers fou  
Hamewith crost the Links  
Airm in airm we're daft eneuch -  
Why blame it on the drinks?

(D.W. p. 25)

In the same way the bleakness of a poem like 'In a Time of Deepest Wanhope' is superseded in 'Hymn of Luve til Venus Queen' by an assertive and positive tone proclaiming the worth of love as transcendent force and mode of preserving a sense of Self amid the world's defilements:

Man ohn luve is walkan neep  
Man ohn luve is langelt stot  
Man ohn luve is hauf man  
    Luve is ane gowden croun,

Man wi luve is potent prince  
Man wi luve is laurelled bard  
Man wi luve is throned gode  
    Luve is ane gowden croun.  
Man alane mocks man  
Man thegither mocks gode  
Man an mate mock daith



Queen o luve, tak this leid,  
 For Naoise an Deidre  
 Cleopatra, Antony  
 For Marion and Sydney  
 Queen o luve, tak this leid.

(D.W. p. 28)

'Hymn o Luve til Venus Queen' owes much to the work of Alexander Montgomerie (see for instance his 'A Description of Tyme') and the Scots of Montgomerie's time (c. 1545-98) as with the Mediaeval Scots of Dunbar, provide a distinctive stylistic allusiveness throughout 'Venus'. But this is also significant in that it supplements and drives home the timeless and prevailing nature of the main themes, a textual concomitant, and links closely to the theme of potential transcendence. For Goodsir Smith the outlaw voice is epitomised by the Makars, and the use of a kindred linguistic form here is emblematic of the survival of that outlaw voice in the language itself. Such a textual correlative also has its embodiment in that opening echo of Burns in 'Prolegomenon' and in Goodsir Smith's use of the supernatural with its long tradition in Scottish literature. The inclusion of ballad forms as well as the adaptations from Villon also play their parts in this respect. Indeed, touching on Villon, it is possible to broaden this perspective to embrace the work of the *Grands Rhetoriqueurs* of the French Renaissance, founded on the work of Eustace Deschamps and Guillaume Machaut. Their writings were known to Chaucer and they form part of a Franco-Scottish tradition pertinent to both Henryson and Douglas, as well as to Montgomerie in the sixteenth century, during which the tradition enjoyed a dramatic re-emergence. The French poet Ronsard was of particular significance in Montgomerie's development and French forms such as *rime batelée*, *rondeau* and *rime renfoncée*, typical of the *rhetoriqueurs*, are incorporated and adapted in his work.

'Hymn of Luve til Venus Queen' owes a good deal to these last two forms, as well as to Montgomerie's innovations, in its structure and technique. Notable here in this respect is the use of refrain and syntactic repetition, the use of anaphrase in the repetition of opening consonants and the pervasive use of alliteration: features which when conjoined serve to build up chantlike rhythms much akin to the effects achieved in Montgomerie's 'A Description of Tyme'. The texture of this poem is testimony to Goodsir Smith's scholarship, but the use of these earlier models and rhetorical strategies is designed to emphasise the sense of

timelessness which is crucial to Goodsir Smith's central theme.

4

The second section of *The Deevil's Waltz*, 'Prometheus', develops many of the themes of 'Venus' more explicitly and directly in more obviously contemporary contexts. This is signalled in the language itself for the Mediaeval trappings are replaced by more accessible Scots much more akin to contemporary spoken idiom and more appropriate to the political and industrial themes which prevail in this section.<sup>13</sup>

The central tale of Prometheus correlates in numerous ways to Goodsir Smith's main themes throughout. Prometheus, in spite of Zeus was said to have stolen animatory fire from Olympus, that animation, often symbolically related as the animation of men of clay, represented the teaching of 'all useful arts' to 'mortals'. In retribution Zeus had Prometheus chained to 'a rock on Mount Caucasus, where in the daytime an eagle consumed his liver, which was restored in each succeeding night'. Zeus, in a further act of vengeance on man, had Hephaestus create Pandora from the earth, the first woman, whose ill-advised opening of the Olympian box unleashed all ills upon man, a symbolic connection to the skaiths of love forming the backbone of the 'Venus' section of *The Deevil's Waltz*.<sup>14</sup>

In this section of the book it is the symbolically mutilated presence of Prometheus himself which pervades from the start: 'On a black craig in hie Caucase / Prometheus hingan nicht an day' ('Prometheus', D.W. p. 31). That mutilated presence is invoked throughout in various permutations linking the Prometheus tale to other outlaw personae and to the condition of man in a constricting world. In the poem 'The Viaduct' the central image is the figure of a man leaning over a bridge and viewed from below:

A fowr-airched railway viaduct  
Rears abune the Largo road,  
A man leans owre the parapet  
Titanic i the humin-scaud-  
Godlike, spieran, miscontentit Man,

(D.W. p. 32)

That figure provides a parallel to that of the veering, bloodied image of Prometheus cited above. In 'The Viaduct' the mutilations take the

form of a savaged soul, subjective essences systematically destroyed and consumed just as Prometheus is physically consumed, each by external oppressive forces.

Bairn o historie, luiks doun-  
 Heir til the lang-kent truth o the fowk  
 Leart i the cradle tae be corrupt  
 Bi a sleet system ere he's grown-  
 Bedevilled, spieran, ignorant, unfree  
 Surveys his riven legacie.

(D.W. p. 32)

Here too the implications of a dehumanising industrialism are apparent in the incorporation of the railway viaduct, emblematic of exploitation, oppressive force embodied in stone. The contemporary significance of these lines is further emphasised in 'Prometheus' itself:

Nou freedom fails in field an wynd  
 A certain pattren haunts ma mind  
 O' man's impassioned protest killt  
 Bi the owreharlan pouer that Fate  
 Gies gratis til the tyrant's haund  
 Tae dumb truth's peril til his state;  
 Wi fleeran crest it aye maun tilt  
 Naukit at armoured ermined hate.

(D.W. p. 31)

Such images and symbols of oppression and mutilation are expanded as this section develops. In 'John MacLean Martyr' disfigured industrial landscapes and allusions to war are incorporated in the mutilation scenario while in 'Ye Mongers Aye Need Masks for Cheatrie' the stark image of Chopin is employed to illustrate the implications of such oppression's correlation to both individual and nation:

His rasch face sterk wi pouer an daith  
 An aa the agonie o Poland's skaith.

(D.W. p. 38)

From the example of Chopin Goodsir Smith moves on in the succeeding poem 'Agin Black Spats' to provide a catalogue of mutilated rebels, outlaws, poets and martyrs:

Gregor was taen; Pearse was shot  
 I' the cauld dawn frae prison;  
 Wallace they hackit an hung on yetts;  
 The guillotine got Danton;  
 Marlowe got a drunkart's knife;  
 Maistlike a swayan rope  
 Tuik Frankie Villon's life;  
 Wi wershlie deean hope  
 O' libertie Pushkin lies  
 Gagged bi royal spies;  
 While Byron dwined in a bog  
 An Rabbie's leid gies text til sods  
 That prate o freedom  
 An practice feedom.

(D.W. p. 39)

As the historical perspective unravels, the faces and denominations may change but little else, whether Wallace's Scotland or Chopin's Poland.

As the love skaiths of 'Venus' devolve to the physical mutilations of 'Prometheus' so too here the correlative stone-derived images of caging and burying are developed in distinctive ways, tying up more closely while at the same time assuming more clearly defined tangential significances. This is most apparent in a series of four poems, 'The Staunan Stanes' (comprising 'Efter Exercism', 'The Gluttons', 'Beethoven' and 'Pompei').

In 'Efter Exercism' the stones appear as 'Three giants petrified', (D.W. p. 34) their significances ambiguous. On one level they correspond to man in an equally petrified state, their essences masked, whether 'o deil or priest' cannot be fathomed. The overall correspondence though is to those earlier images of transcendence, for the stones can also symbolise perpetuation: '– their sleep / Is waukan aye; they mock / The deid and hate the quick.' (D.W. p. 34), in this respect they are emblematic, a sculpted reminder of the same historical perspectives watched over by Prometheus. The survival of the stones and their impenetrable essences is synonymous with the survival of the equally unfathomable outlaw whose allegiance to god or devil, beyond the realms of symbolism, is similarly ambiguous. The concluding lines of the poem proffer an image of awakening: 'in our livan breist / The deid is deid, God pit / *Resurgam* i the room of hit.' (D.W. p. 34), the biblical allusion a concomitant of the

roused consciousness epitomised by the rebel personae who feature throughout.

The second poem 'The Gluttons' is also a poem of awakening. This relates closely to 'The Widdreme' discussed earlier, just as the gorgon rising from behind the wall in that poem served to represent un-nameable fears and actualities so too here the stones loom from beyond another wall with their equally unsettling intimations:

Ayont the dyke staun three  
Auld Stanes that speakless speak  
O' man's mortalitie;

(D.W. p. 34)

Here the stranglehold is broken, the stones 'cannae gar them greit / That lang were hemlock-steght are free / Frae life's dreid pyson, thowlessrie' (D.W. p. 34). 'Thowlessrie' is glossed as impotence, again a partial referent of the stone, indicative of the individual's paralysis and inability to control life. This too is a quality of the stone which must be realised, the stones hold fear only for those who cannot look their own realities in the face. That intrinsic dichotomy has its mirror image in the essence of man: 'God made us glutton, nocht we hae / But in excess, o hevin or hell;' (D.W. p. 34). The last lines are not so much a plea as a statement of intent to pursue and achieve objectives: 'God grant us three: / Luve and meat and libertie.' (D.W. p. 34). In these lines prevalent themes are conjoined, the love themes of 'Venus', and the positive forces that represents, are linked with the prevalent themes of escape or transcendence, in turn tying to images of nourishment which derive from recurrent allusions to imprisonment and impotence. Here too, that the stones have been marked, '*Memento mori*', has ambiguous significance, recalling the fatalities of war, yet, that man has marked the stones suggests a watershed, a turning point to balance the negative aspects of the many dead.

In 'Beethoven' the positive qualities represented by stone are overtly conjoined to the image of the outsider, in this case Beethoven as prime innovator:

Rock-cast his skull o the weathered world  
Is raff wi sic lane pride  
O' the shackle-brakken saul  
Wald breist the wide

Steep bounds o man's pent,  
Sleepless, weirdit discontent.

(D.W. p. 35)

The sculpted image of Beethoven symbolises the transcendent man, the 'shackle-brakken saul', expanding the implications of the imprisonment themes and the significance of the outlaw personae. Integral to that 'rock-cast' image is the 'daithless speak' of Prometheus, a timeless echo which offers a positive, pervasive force to counter-balance the negatives implicit in the Devil's snell winds. In the poem the images of Prometheus and Beethoven are indivisible, personifying an arrogant dignity in the midst of the Devil's own landscape:

Here, helmeted wi wunds, luiks owre the bleak  
Daith-ridden mongerlands, a wean  
Brocht furth in tourbilloun  
Tae bigg a warld, or ding blinn Gaza down.

(D.W. p. 35)

These densely convoluted lines present a neatly compressed representation of the tangled matrix we are dealing with here. The central wind-sculpted image casts up lucid echoes of Prometheus and the figure of Man on the viaduct, the compact scenario is of the pervasive tourbillon, the waste land in the wind-swept turbulence of the symbolic Devil's waltz. The closing lines too set up sharp echoes of Peter Morrison, the birth or awakening of the iconoclastic *enfant terrible* in the midst of negating chaos. The existential outlaw symbolising the potential for transformation and transcendence.

The four poems here illustrate a characteristic movement in Goodsir Smith's work, a movement facilitated by devious manifestation and manipulation of symbol and image in a process of cumulative association culminating in direct expression. That kind of movement as we have seen is a distinctive factor in 'The Wanderer', in effect, from the covert to the overt. In *The Deevil's Waltz* such movements are more elusive, appearing rather in a series of staggered waves rather than in one readily discernible over-all movement.

'Pompei' provides the most overt expression so far of the connotations and implications of the diverse strands of theme, image and symbol; from the stone to the socio-political concomitant. The poem opens on the petrified scenario of Pompeii, engulfed by Vesuvius.

The impartiality of the volcano, its associations of relentlessness once in motion are portrayed as synonymous with the equally stultifying, relentless and impartial machinations of government, of the 'Mongers':

But nou the flesh is no the aim  
 Agin the free-mind nou they draw,  
 The saul o man they'd cage in braw  
 Neat, polished, menseless bane,  
 They'd pent in gray the watergaw  
 And smoor the licht i the een o weans.

(D.W. p. 35)

The closing stanza provides commentary on the nature of that scenario accomplished, appropriately here by relating Blake's commentary on the nature of dictatorial regimes:

Blake said frae Caesar's diadem  
 Cam the strangmaist pyson kent-  
 We souk it doun, daith's sacrament  
 That petrifies the wull,

(D.W. p. 35)

The battle lines are drawn, Blake, the bandit seer, Caesar a key invocation of dictatorial oppression, the diadem itself a symbolic adjunct: traditionally of laurel leaves which when distilled with water produces a sedating narcotic. In that state, petrified and incapable of thought or even recognition of that fact, we are swindled, our souls stolen as surely as if appropriated by the Devil himself, 'then / Caesar we worship innocent / Astride the backs o his leal men,' (D.W. p. 35).

None of the inner movements such as those discernible in this 'stone' sequence, exist in isolation, each inner series interlocks, the one with another, serving to establish a larger and more complex network. This works on all levels and can be illustrated almost in miniature by taking a broader view of some of the structural developments and underlying specifics integral to some of the poems in this section of *The Deevil's Waltz*.

One area of particular significance is exemplified in the poem 'Ballant O John MacLean' where, as above, central features of the work as a whole are densely clustered. MacLean's attempt to establish the Scottish Workers' Republican Party, intended to function as a working



revolutionary Soviet, not surprisingly precipitated considerable hostility from the establishment in all its guises, his harassment, constituting skaiths more palpable than those of Prometheus, are described in the poem:

Though mocked an hated, crucified,  
An jailed an mocked again,

(D.W. p. 36)

In this respect too the images of stone and of imprisonment find their focus:

On prison stanes they laid his heid  
An prison gruel was his breid.

(D.W. p. 37)

The accumulations continue as Goodsir Smith makes MacLean's position in the historical scenario clear:

Muir an Wallace his prison mates  
Lenin an Connolly,

(D.W. p. 36)

Similarly, the Prometheus parallel is reinforced in the portrayal of Maclean as benefactor of the people:

Ahint his corp throu broukit streets  
Three miles o murners thrang,  
He wan the hate o the Monger breed  
But the luve o his ain was strang.

(D.W. p. 37)

Most tellingly here, Goodsir Smith, in illustrating MacLean's struggle with a wholly corporeal oppression, makes the connection explicit:

'I see yir guilt there rinnan down  
Heid til fit the bluid rins reid  
Ye're loftit there lik godes abune  
But the feet are clay an the hert's deid.'

(D.W. p. 37)

The cross-reference between divine oppression and judicial oppression completes the link with Prometheus and ties in the many related strands of image and symbol. Like Prometheus, MacLean lives on in our consciousness, his 'daithless speak' is on the wind, the movement from Prometheus to MacLean is a regenerative one, emblematic of the ongoing struggle yet positive in its echoing of the survival of outlaw consciousness.

As in 'The Wanderer' then, the worth of the outsider is the capacity to deal with the monstrous, whether internal or external, to confront and continue, 'Unseen makes a false face.' ('The Terror of Saul's Truth and the Truth of Saul's Terror' D.W. p. 31). As in 'Venus', although the Devil's waltz goes on, the winds still pervade, the overall emphasis here is on the positive, MacLean's words live on, ' . . . they brakna his words o flame / Nor dousit his memorie,' ('Ballant o John MacLean' D.W. p. 37), and the lines which close this section of *The Deevil's Waltz*, from the poem 'The Pricks' are unequivocally assertive:

Theres twa weirds nou the saul can dree  
 – Recht sempil, brithers; kick, or dee!

(D.W. p. 40)

## 5

Section three of *The Deevil's Waltz* is 'Mars' and as the title suggests the pervasive theme here is war; the enactment of the Devil's waltz itself, the ultimate manifestation and only logical conclusion of the catalogue of fundamental wrongs, injustice and corruptions dealt with in sections one and two of this collection. This section constitutes the culmination of the overall movements underlying the book, here smaller, inner movements are allocated their niches in the whole, themes which have been semi-palpable beneath the book's surface weave at last emerge and are realised in often vicious expression. In this respect, and appropriately with regard to the theme of war, the mutilations abound.

In 'Mars' Goodsir Smith intensifies the pervasive symbolism of sections one and two, multiple associations built up steadily and are filtered through to 'Mars', almost as residue. The focus here is on mutilation, which is much more physically tangible, immediate, violent: this is enactment, not representation. In 'On the Don, August 1942', physical damage is related in readily identifiable terms:

Oor lips ware burst, oor mous  
An thrapples paircht wi drouth

(D.W. p. 47)

Such specifics bring pain to a more personal, experiential level. Similarly in this poem, awareness of what is actually going on outwith such physical specifications adds a subjective dimension paralleling the immediately physical:

Oor hauns ware blistered on the guns  
As we killt an killt – ech, killt!

(D.W. p. 47)

Blistered hands and burst lips effectively serve to heighten perceptions of the greater carnage of war, the actualities of dismemberment, of death, of mutilated corpses, the vocabulary here conveying images of the dead as no more than bad butcher meat, fit only for the scavengers, in 'El Alamein':

Around El Alamein  
Ranks o carrion  
Faur frae their hame  
Ligg sterk i the sun  
I' the rutted sand  
Whaur the tanks has run.

(D.W. p. 50)

As ' . . . the gleds foregaiter / Roun Alba's deid.' ('El Alamein' D.W. p. 50), earlier images of Prometheus find their focus, transposed from realms of myth and legend to the harsh realities of torn bodies left to rot in the sun.

That such images of waste and mutilation are the extreme manifestations of a deeper, universal sickness is spelled out explicitly in 'On the Don, August 1942'. The poem itself is a hypothetical dialogue between 'A soldier o the Reid Army' (D.W. p. 47) fighting outside Stalingrad and a Scots soldier caught up in the desert war. The correlation of different nationalities and locations illustrates the poem's universal implications, a point emphatically made as the dialogue unfolds:

And i the outcome o the widdrem years

Thort ben an muir an ocean we'se tak hauns  
 Forenent the warld o mongerdom, ma fier,  
 Wi ilka trauchled folk o mapamound  
 Nou hauden down  
 Bi enemy or self-appointit frien  
 On Ganges, Yangste or Norwegian fiord  
 Moldau, Ebro or the Somme  
 Danube, Forth,  
 Or Don.

(D.W. p. 49)

Such expansion takes the poem contextually outwith the ostensive war and although Nazism is utilised as the primary manifestation of oppression here, the German troops themselves are portrayed as 'The teeman gray slave thousans' (D.W. p. 47), as victims of the same mentality. As the Scots soldier has it, the Russians, 'Hae focht an fecht for Russia an aa men / (Tho that ye little ken);' (D.W. p. 48). By comparison to other nations, like Scotland, Russia had been seen to revolt, superseding (or so it seemed in 1942) the quiescence Goodsir Smith portrays as characteristic of too many of the nations under the Monger's thumb. Looking back to 'Ye Mongers Aye Need Masks for Cheatrie', we can pick up specific strands emphasising the implications for Scotland:

Wha'll pent trulie Scotland's heid  
 Nae couthy gloam but mirk an reid?  
 Skail yir myth o the Union year  
 Saw mob an riot but deil a cheer?  
 Syne an Empire's biggit wi Scottis bluid  
 – But wha'd hae gane gin hame was guid?

(D.W. p. 38)

So the Scots too allow themselves to become the tools of oppression (the most acute testimony to defeat, the most debasing mode of oppression): nations like individuals can be too easily swindled.

These war poems, with their physical immediacy and contemporaneity, taken in conjunction with the preceding historical perspectives and parallels, present a grim world-view, a view rammed home in 'Mars' as various other strands of image, symbol and theme are made manifest in their most objective, pertinent forms.

The diverse images of entrapment find their ultimate expression in scenarios derived from war and industry. In 'On the Don, August 1942', the Russian soldiers are driven to fighting, 'frae neuks / An dernit bields,' (D.W. p. 49), in essence like animals driven to earth, debased by circumstances they do not control. Similarly the war has the effect of escalating industry, ensnaring non-combatants as surely as the soldiers, a point illustrated in 'The War in Fife':

But anither race has come, the pits  
Breed a raucle fowk nae geck beguiles,  
Deep i the yerth nae haar affects  
The second war i the land o Fife.

(D.W. p. 53)

Even in the wake of war there are few images of hope here, the poem 'On Readan the Polish Buik o the Nazi Terror', sees only the prospect of altered forms of subjugation and oppression in the 'retour tae the sleepless wark / In basement an bothie, in slum and mill' (D.W. p. 43).

In the book's closing poem, 'The Arbroath Declaration, April 6th, 1320', the very concepts of freedom, epitomised here by invocation of the declaration, are ritually snuffed out – implicit in the smothering of Arbroath itself in shrouds of fog:

Thares a cauld haar that comes on Fife,  
It dumbs the burds in ilka tree;  
At Arbroath toun is celebrate  
The pledge made Scotland free –  
But like a haar's the Deid Haund  
Maks words a mockerie.

(D.W. p. 54)

As strands derived from burying and stifling are allotted new focal points and assume more complex implications, so too themes centered on stone are integrated in diverging forms. The use of 'gray' with regard to the German 'slave thousands' (p. 47) correlates; the colour alone by this stage imbued with multiple significance, from the petrification of free will integral to the stone theme, to the bleak industrial symbolism indicative of control, corruption and dehumanisation.

In 'Epitaph for a Pilot' the utilisation of stone is characteristically ambivalent:

'My eagle, O ma darlin is asleep,  
Deid is ma luve, ma bricht yin's gane;'

(D.W. p. 46)

That the death at the core of the poem comes as a consequence of war is negative, a further indicator of the fundamental ill amid which we now exist. Central to the poem is the superfluoussness of a monument to the pilot's memory, 'An, Christ, whit can a monument eer speak? / That he was fearless, nobil, wantan maik?' (D.W. p. 46): intrinsically a jibe at those in power, responsible ultimately for the death who offer only another dead and empty thing in recompense. Yet the last two lines of the poem:

Och, heap the unkent cairn upon the unkent grave  
-The hert kens mair nor monuments can raise.

(D.W. p. 46)

constitute a positive assertion of the superiority – and implicitly, the eventual triumph of the fundamentally human, the emotional, feeling core – over all the bleak and suppressive forces symbolised in the stone: love, in one form or another again functioning as a mode of sustenance.

Blood and bone pervade the 'Mars' section of the book, a subsidiary aspect of the mutilation theme, yet here too Goodsir Smith's use of these basic images can be just as paradoxical as his use of stone. This is most apparent in 'On the Don, August 1942', Goodsir Smith presents a battle-torn scenario, the sun itself partaking of the bloody nature of the landscape:

. . . throu the fause  
Perpetual humin aye the sun  
Bluid-reid hung lik a hairvest muin  
As it micht hae been nicht  
On the Don.

(D.W. p. 47)

The literally hellish aspects of the situation are explicitly signalled in 'We focht i the brunstane reik o the pit,' (D.W. p. 47), preceding the lines above, yet the bloodied sun is likened to a 'hairvest muin', basically a symbol of life and fecundity; the antithesis of the death scenario over

which it presides. Later in the poem, however, that intrinsic paradox is elucidated:

But ken ye yet the time wull come  
 A bluid-reid sun owre Forth an Clyde  
 (Wald it was nou!)  
 Whan we lik you sall reive  
 Oor richt an lang-tint ain-  
 Wad I cud ken that nou we did,  
 That aa thir muckle sum  
 O' Scotlan's bluid  
 Wald purchase freedom!  
 -Sae it wull, nor spent in vain  
 Nae mair nor yours, man, i the reik  
 That nicht be nicht  
 On the Don.

(D.W. p. 48)

The war at Stalingrad may be hellish, but it could *then* be seen as a consequence of attempted imposition of a dictatorial regime on a free people, free of the 'Monger rulers'; so that the Russian struggle may be construed as emblematic of the international struggle against oppression in whatever form it may take. Implicit in the lines above is a lamentation that while Scottish blood has been spilt in the fight against fascism, that is only half the battle while Scotland remains subject to England. The 'bluid-red' sun is emblematic of that ultimate struggle in its many forms and its intrinsic Socialist implications are emphasised by the Russian correlative. Fundamentally then a potentially transcendent image, the poem itself an anticipation of imminent rising, a direct correlative to earlier references to the awakening of consciousness in the individual, for Goodsir Smith the two go hand in hand.

## 6

If at this stage we now look back over Goodsir Smith's first three collections, it is useful to pinpoint certain features distinctive to each. In *Skail Wind* there is a fascination with juxtaposition, most distinctively of subjective and objective perspective, a propensity for lexical and rhetorical over-kill, accompanied by a notable stylistic restlessness



and, finally, considerable acumen in the manipulation of landscape. In *The Wanderer and Other Poems* Goodsir Smith explored his interest in sequential principles, in structural logistics, and the manipulation of various personae in conjunction with the distinctive emergence of the various 'outlaw' themes. *The Deevil's Waltz* is a more densely compressed collection where complex inter-relationships and correlations of image, symbol, allusion and theme are established and mutated, permeating the book in an almost alchemical manner. These diverse components gell in Goodsir Smith's next collection of poems *Under The Eildon Tree* (1948).

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FIGURES I THE REEK<sup>1</sup>

#### 1

With the war gone, if far from forgotten, by the time *The Deevil's Waltz* appeared in 1946, Goodsir Smith settled down to some solid writing – and took off in several different directions simultaneously. In the latter half of the 40s he produced the first draft of his experimental novel *Carotid Cornucopius* as well as a stage adaptation of that work titled *Colickie Meg* (at present this remains unpublished). He was also working on the shorter lyric poems which would eventually comprise *So Late Into The Night* (1952). For present purposes however, most significantly, in 1948 he published *Under The Eildon Tree* regarded by many as ranking with MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle* as among the finest long poems in twentieth century Scottish literature.

*Under The Eildon Tree* has much in common not only with MacDiarmid's poem but with other seminal modernist works such as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and *Homage to Sextus Propertius* as well as James Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>2</sup> Goodsir Smith too incorporates an extensive sub-stratum of classical and mediaeval allusion, reference and style which further strengthens such cross-reference, while his use of sometimes radical juxtapositions of ideas, form, tone and mood similarly invites comparison to the modernist framework. In many respects there is much in common too between the work of the modernists, and particularly the postmodernists, and the mediaeval poets, often seeming to have more in common with one another than they do with anything in between. MacDiarmid's 'Back to Dunbar' and Pound's 'Make it new' having much more in common on one level at least than at first may seem apparent. This is particularly apparent in the prevalence of densely textured use of rhetoric, complex irony and the writer's incorporation of self-deflationary humour, often incorporating commentary on a work embedded in the work itself. However, Goodsir Smith's practice and achievement is, as should become clear, significantly different in kind and that difference is important to diverse areas of this poem and to the context in which it was written, specifically to the Scottish literary scene in the wake of the Second World War, although in broader terms this relates to

issues central to the development of western literary culture as a whole.

With regard to the specifically Scottish context meanwhile, the 'literary life' Goodsir Smith had briefly pursued in London in the 30s was now pretty much a 40s Edinburgh reality. *Poetry Scotland* was on the go, edited by Maurice Lindsay from 1943 to 1949, the Makars' Club meetings were taking place in the Abbotsford with the 'Lallans debate' in full swing. The Saltire Society too was working away, making available the work of the likes of William Dunbar and Alexander Montgomerie as well as publishing the work of the younger contemporary poets such as Douglas Young and Alexander Scott with Goodsir Smith's own *Selected Poems* appearing in 1947 in the Saltire Modern Poets series (at one shilling and sixpence).<sup>3</sup>

The 40s also saw the appearance of seminal works now regarded as central to modern Scottish literature. There was MacDiarmid's important 'autobiography' *Lucky Poet* (1943) for instance along with a broad spectrum of work ranging from Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings* in 1941 through to Hamish Henderson's *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* in 1949. 1943 also brought the publication of the equally important *Dain do Eimhir* from Sorley MacLean, now recognised as the foremost Gaelic poet of the century. MacLean and Goodsir Smith had been friends since 1939 and by 1946 the MacLeans were living with the Goodsir Smiths at the infamous 'Schloss Schmidt - I' the umquhile park o Craigmillar House' of *Under The Eildon Tree* (p. 20, the 1948 edition), Edinburgh's 50 Craigmillar Park.

Norman MacCaig too, whose own first book, *A Far Cry* was published in 1943, remembers his first meeting with Goodsir Smith and MacDiarmid, among many others, taking place in the Southsider bar in 1946. More vividly though he recalls many a night in the Cafe Royal in the early post-war years with Goodsir Smith, drinking bad rum as the only available carry-out accompanied by equally bad cigarettes.<sup>4</sup> That period for MacCaig though stands as one of intense energy with the Edinburgh of the day providing a highly charged atmosphere for writers, poets, painters and dramatists. The Edinburgh Festival was established in 1947 with Robert Kemp's revision of Lyndsay's *Thrie Estaitis* featuring importantly in the 1948 Festival.

So the core of that 'second generation' of the Scottish renaissance was gathering, with many another intriguing figure 'around'. The composer Ronald Stevenson, the painters John Maxwell and Denis

Peploe, the poets Robert Garioch and Tom Scott as well as the apparently omnipresent Hector McIver, among the closest of Goodsir Smith's many friends, who seems to have known everyone and to have been an unusually influential figure. McIver is affectionately commemorated in Trevor Royle's book *Precipitous City: The Story of Literary Edinburgh* where Royle recounts the tale of McIver, a Lewisman, dining with Louis MacNeice at the Cafe Royal, returning his lobster 'because he doubted its Lewis origins'.

For all this though if life on the literary front was in full ferment for Goodsir Smith in this period, all was not so comfortable on the domestic front. Norman MacCaig recalls that Goodsir Smith's first wife Marion had some difficulty dealing with her husband's more bohemian inclinations and that all between them at this time was not well. In this respect too Hazel Goodsir Smith recounts that early in the 50s Goodsir Smith himself saw *Under The Eildon Tree* as, in part, a response to, or way of dealing with, a particularly unhappy and damaging love affair which went badly wrong in the build up to the poem's composition.<sup>5</sup>

To some extent then, the backdrop to *Under The Eildon Tree* is both volatile and paradoxical; a mixture of intense creativity, the energy input of a flourishing social and literary environment along with domestic instability and emotional disruption. All qualities which feature in one respect or another in the densely woven reticulation of the poem and suggestive of the roots to some of the curious and sometimes unsettling shadings of light and dark, levity and pessimism which run throughout the poem. In subsequent chapters I will return to work such as *So Late Into The Night* and *Carotid Cornucopius* written in this period, but at this point I will deal specifically with *Under The Eildon Tree*, arguably the finest single work of his entire output, and take a look at some of the elements which make this a work of such importance.

The poem consists of twenty-four intimately related elegies and the use of the term 'elegies' here is in itself already suggestive of a number of abstruse areas into which we will have to move, for if, on one level, this is a poem on the deaths of lovers and love and certainly fulfils the original stipulation of a serious, subjective meditation on whatever topic, there is also a level here where underlying areas of concern draw on the death of poetic power and on the death of the poet as 'visionary'.

This is a point to which I will return but at this stage it is worth bearing in mind a central paradox, while Goodsir Smith in many ways aligns his work and role with that of the Makars (and this is one tentative example of a more complex area) he also juxtaposes and contrasts a decadent

persona of his own against the character and achievements of the many precedents he incorporates in the weave of his poem. He embraces and distances himself from various traditions and concepts simultaneously, a dual function integral to the poem's underlying objectives.

The poem's bonding, though to some extent, ostensive, theme however is 'love', systematically elucidated through the incorporation of a gathering of voices. These characteristically range from the real to the mythic to the fictive, from Burns to Orpheus, from True Thomas to Sydney Slugabed Godless Smith, the last, a pervasive guise adopted by the poet in this poem. This initial approach functions dually, firstly in opening inroads to the poem's exploration of the nature of love as it relates to the diverse personae. On a deeper level too though, as each character and the historical or mythological context to which he or she belongs is fleshed out, we are drawn towards the manifold ramifications which will constitute the poem's primary themes. Secondly, this technique provides simultaneously a means of identifying, 'tagging' via *dramatis personae*, the diverse and often paradoxical components which make up 'the poet's', or any other individual's, complex and finely balanced inner-being.

The directions suggested by these preliminary strategies enable the poem to move well beyond its base theme of love, with which it can sometimes, as you get deeper, seem to have very little to do, to levels on which Goodsir Smith can delve in more deeply than ever before to prevalent concerns, the nature and inter-relationships of objective and subjective realities, the nature of 'self' and the strange ways of the world. This is a poem about poetry and poets too though: one disconcerting vein of the poem is that it is a poem about a poet writing a poem (about a poet writing a poem about a poem about a poet – lots of them in fact). Artifice defuses artifice creating, typically paradoxically, a cumulative authenticity and honesty (and that is a viable word in such a web of artifice), which could otherwise be unattainable, equally, it is also suggestive of some of the quasi-postmodern areas into which this poem moves.

Aspects such as these however while providing inroads of our own are indicative only of three levels among a diversity here. *Under The Eildon Tree* strenuously resists attempts to formulate keys to its component parts, primarily because form and content, styles and implications, are so intricately interwoven and gell so coherently that it is extremely difficult to discuss one element on any level without cross-reference to every other aspect of the poem as a whole. The movement sketched

above, from an ostensive to an actual subject matter is accomplished once more along highly devious routes though an expansion of this approach typifies the mechanics employed in the poem as a whole and constitutes an integral component of the poem's primary implications.

2

So, we can begin with a look at some of the bones holding things together here before moving on to look in closer detail at how, and with what, they are fleshed. It is appropriate to take as a stepping off point 'love' itself, for its incorporation here is a much more intricate business than our expectations of a more traditional 'love poetry' may lead us to anticipate. Kurt Wittig for instance, writing of love as it is manifest in Goodsir Smith's work observes that:

Above all, love is a complex and very subtle experience: at once carnal, emotional and spiritual, rational and irrational.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, writing on the same topic, Alexander Scott has his own compendium of love's tangents:

Tenderness and terror, enjoyment and ennui, delight and despair—these are only a few of the countless facets of love which the book expresses.<sup>7</sup>

Such examples are accurate and are in effect expansions of the poem's epigraph, a citation from Gavin Douglas' *Eneados* which I will quote in full here for it does offer a highly specific foretaste of what is to follow:

'Your sweet mirthis are mixt with bitterness;  
Quhat is your drearie game? a merry pain;  
Your wark unthrift, your quiet is restless,  
Your lust liking in langour to remain,  
Friendship torment, your traist is but ane trane:  
O luv quidder art thou joy or fulishness,  
That makis folk sa glaid of thair distress.'

The various components enumerated by Wittig and Scott and the dualism apparent in this epigraph point to many of the poem's central



themes: the segmentation of identity, self-delusion, the transience of all things, human fragility and strength as well as the pervasiveness of both good and evil – the confused space in between in which we all exist. Further, the nature of, and the fitting material, for poetry itself.

These components in turn, by their inherently paradoxical nature, correlate and mesh with the various stylistic techniques employed by Goodsir Smith; the juxtapositions of the surrealist or the complex manipulations of the rhetorician for instance, both in themselves and on an extended level, in contrast to one another, provide an ideally matched technique in approaching such persistently malleable, metamorphic subject matter, being mutually reflective and elucidatory: a process of echoing and mirroring attendant too to the poem's broad lexical reach, grammatical acrobatics through to the incorporation of complex rhetorical modes, from adaptations derived from the conventions of mediaeval allegory to epic simile to modernist convolution, and on to elaborate literary allusion and brass-necked macaronics.

These components collide and transect in a dense intertexture of escalating intricacy. This may all sound a bit much and it is further intensified by Goodsir Smith's adoption of mediaeval spelling conventions in places, 'umquhile' or, say, 'afflictoun', a technique which provides a distinctively alien texture to the poetry which, when divorced from Goodsir Smith's highly individualistic spellings, are not so far from English or all that close to any extant mode of Scots yet provide a degree of tonal variation and irony, notably the pseudo-grandiose, which could not be achieved in rigid adherence to either language alone, or for that matter, together. In addition though, twining through the midst of all this, there is a bonding thread of contemporary demotic Scots, both urban and rural which, among other things, serves to undercut and mock any propensity for grandiloquence, a function blatantly assisted by the use of occasional parenthetical and dismissive asides in the wake of particularly sophisticated or high-flown pronouncements, irony satire and self-consciousness constituting a further level of complexity.

The dualism laid bare in the epigraph then is echoed throughout *Under The Eildon Tree*. 'My torment and my extasie' (U.E.T., p. 18); on a related level too, this epigraph is a characteristic convention in mediaeval and early Renaissance poetry, here recontextualised in a post-Freudian era and examined in intrinsically existentialist terms. For Goodsir Smith, love, like the human mind, is Janus-faced and never static, a fundamental premise here which in extrapolated form indicates the nature and concerns of the poem's substance and construction. The ideas and



components cited above offer a summation of the poem's texture and something of the overall context which Goodsir Smith has constructed within which to work. Bearing these issues in mind we can move on to examine how this amalgam is deployed, how it holds together and what the resultant construction adds up to.

### 3

The most direct route into the matrix of the poem is to focus on two integral and parallel tangents, the use of irony and the pervasive modes of juxtaposition. At ground level the use of irony is apparent in Goodsir Smith's juxtaposition of vocabulary, as in this extract from the thirteenth elegy:

Dour as stane, the like stane  
As biggit the unconquerable citie  
Whar they pullulate,  
    Infestan  
The wynds and closes, squares  
And public promenads  
    -The bonnie craturies!  
    -But til our winter's tale.

(U.E.T., p. 38)

Here the polysyllabic, Latinate derivatives are juxtaposed with the largely monosyllabic demotic Scots: again in terms of mediaeval prototypes it is worth noting that this was also a favoured technique in the work of Dunbar, further reinforcing the poem's mediaeval infrastructure. Meanwhile, to succeed 'The bonnie craturies', with regard to the 'hures o Reekie' with an allusion to Shakespeare compounds the latent incongruity. Goodsir Smith's use of (pseudo) Latin is subjected to equally deflationary tactics in elegy five:

*Eheu fugaces!*  
    *Lacrimae rerum!*  
*Nil nisi et cetera ex cathedra,*  
    *Requiescat up your jumper.*

(U.E.T., p. 20)

Suggestive here as much of a swipe at the modernism of Pound or MacDiarmid as a debunking of the poet's own, and/or his surrogate in the poem, 'Slugabed' the 'Maister o Arts', academic standing. The juxtaposition of linguistic components here testifies to the coexistence of that 'Maister o Arts', the 'Bard and Shennachie', the night rambler, 'Fou as a puggie' as well as the poet himself, outwith the weave and manipulating these guises, each taking a tilt at the other – and Goodsir Smith at himself – in the midst of the poem's lexical complexities. As a last example here, there is the purposely self-conscious classicism of 'Her lyre as white as Dian's chastitie' (U.E.T., p. 41), immediately succeeded by the guttural, onomatopoeic, 'In yon fyle, fousome, clartie slum', and here not only the vocabulary is loaded, the classical and urban scenarios jar no less: similarly, the evocation of the Edinburgh whore Sandra's complexion in mischievously rhapsodic terms.

Such apparent incongruities and juxtapositions in the poem correlate to the various facets of the narrator's own make-up, though as in so much of the work it is impossible, beyond mere speculation, to ascertain the boundaries between guise and 'Sydney Goodsir Smith'. Essentially we have the segmentation of identity, the pieces laid bare on the page, codified in the language and style. This technique, if initially disorientating, is so prevalent in the first half of the poem that it is nonetheless rapidly assimilated so that the reader can quickly come to terms with the presiding personality's humour, intellect and inclinations; indeed, reconciling and contrasting these diverse elements is in itself a major part of what the poem is about.

That personality is one of the primary factors determining the parameters of the context which frames *Under The Eildon Tree*. With that basic contextual level established, firmly by elegy twelve, the juxtapositions become less obtrusive, partly because the style is more subtle but also because we have become accustomed to our narrator and follow inherent ironies and juxtapositions without being so violently jarred.

The process of juxtaposition also serves to establish an ongoing process of recontextualisation. With regard to vocabulary Goodsir Smith anticipates and defuses cliché – an inherent commentary on the ongoing construction of the poem – either in preceding or succeeding components, this vocabulary mocks both itself and its author. The effects achieved are circuitous and cumulative, Goodsir Smith recategorises his language in a way which allows irony and humour to shine through without defusing his serious intent and observations on the complexities of identity, our capacities for self-deception. That serious intent should

never be underestimated in Goodsir Smith, his studies of mediaeval literature provided a sharp perspective on the potentially moral aspects or functions of poetry. Just as in the work of Henryson, here we must look beyond the surface of the text to seek to perceive the integral truths intimated in the allegorical texture of the poem. In Platonic, or more appropriately here, Neoplatonic terms, the poem suggests the paths we may follow while the *moralitas* at the heart of the work spells out the core aim of the work more explicitly, the *moralitas* itself aspiring to some suggestion of the ideal, the most lucid realisation, the form in Plato's scheme, which lies beyond the reach of the discursive intellect.

The ramifications of this approach are wide ranging if we take a broader view and move beyond the essential mechanics of construction. Effectively we can move on up the scale, staying with juxtaposition but looking more closely at the stylistic dimension while at the same time broaching the question of manipulation of personae. In elegy twelve, dealing with Orpheus' lament for Euridice Goodsir Smith remains *ostensibly* faithful to Henryson's version of the Orpheus myth, going so far as to appropriate Henryson's refrain, '*Quhair art thou gane, my luve euridicess?*', as his own, albeit from a philosophically existential perspective as opposed to Henryson's use of the myth as an allegory of Christian redemption. The effect here is to infiltrate a serious and authentic aureate ring simultaneously laced with humour in that the elegy is set predominantly in demotic Scots:

I never kent o her stravaigan  
 Lane and dowie i the fields;  
 Nor that yon Aristaeus loed my queyne.  
 It was fleean him she deed.

(U.E.T., p. 35)

The over-all effect is to radically alter perspective from the aureate realms of demi-gods to the level of farm-yard romance. Orpheus to the stature of plough-hand neglecting his queyne and losing her to the village Casanova, 'yon Aristaeus'. Nonetheless, we must also recognise that although the humour undercuts the seriousness here, Goodsir Smith is fully aware of, and fully intends us to read through the weave and to bear in mind, the symbolic qualities attendant to these characters. Traditionally – and Goodsir Smith plays on this – Orpheus may stand for reason, intellect, Euridices, the sensual, emotional or appetitive with Aristaeus the farm hand, or keeper of beasts in Henryson, functioning

as the governor of sensual passions. For all his playfulness Goodsir Smith expects us to reach beyond the veneer in allegorical terms, here, adapted to the specifications of the twentieth century. Indeed there is a long tradition of interpreting Orpheus and Euridices as integral parts or components of one whole, highly appropriate here given the centrality of that theme to this poem as a whole and the fragmented contexts employed to facilitate complex explorations.

Throughout *Under The Eildon Tree* cross-references and perspectives continually flicker in this way and can be traced from elegy to elegy as well as within particular elegies. In this instance, the elegy succeeding that on Orpheus cuts to a bawdy realism as we are drawn to the 'junketins' of Slugabed, out whoring and boozing at 'The Black Bull'. This creates a jolting contrast to the mythological *and* rustic scenario of elegy twelve yet it reinforces by parallel and elaboration the earthy and pertinent truth embodied in the myth.

The recontextualisation escalates here, elegy twelve is reinforced, redefined and developed in contrast with elegy thirteen which in turn serves to colour our interpretation of elegy twelve itself. In this same way the nineteenth elegy imbued with an implicitly pseudo-romantic gravity is totally disjointed by the incursion of a wildly divergent context:

*Mak saft the hert o Cressid aince again!*

Roun til her o this my coronach,  
 Smoothe her wi clash o immortalitie,  
 Of honour, fame,  
 . . . And streams o press-photographeers!

(U.E.T., p. 55)

Again the polarities emerge, from *The Testament of Cresseid* (or *Troilus and Cressida*, both Henryson and Shakespeare are among the many subliminal voices here), a sufficiently ambiguous tale in itself, abruptly transposed into a context of contemporary gutter-glamour press. Subjectively, certain aspects of love's extremes are embodied, the pathos of the plea to Cressid immediately tempered by the oblique insertion with emotional perspectives flickering as consistently as scenarios. Each passage is multiform and here there are also symbolic referents, from the ideal imagined in Cressid to the vain and more carnal components

attendant to the press allusion, conjoined in turn to the sneaky tactical motivation behind it.

A number of other stylistic juxtapositions are particularly striking, in elegy two Goodsir Smith conjoins a detached and robotic dreamscape (disconcertingly set in demotic Scots):

The faces i the streets  
Micht aa be walkin neeps or tattie-bogles,  
Or aiblins a new race descendit frae the mune.  
I kenna, carena, for I see but you.

(U.E.T., p. 15)

to a haunting surrealistic landscape:

And scribevan sangs o ye  
Is aa my haill activitie,  
The occupation o my waukan days,  
The dwaums that thrang my restless nichts,  
The bouk in clouds,  
The figures i the reek,  
The ferlies i the gleid  
And i the trunks o aulderm treen.

(U.E.T., p. 15)

This in turn is rounded off with a slushy echo from the Kailyard: 'Is aye the face / O' my dear lass'. The overall conjunction more disorientating than the central passage in itself. The Kailyard component which among more of the same would be simply embarrassing, here derives a warmth following on from the modernist disjunction, and *that* is implicitly mocked in the vocabulary, yet that very context mocks the flat statement of emotion because of its contextual placing. Each of these segments throws the others in relief, defusing at the same time as reinforcing each other, again tactics which anticipate the post-modern.

Further ironies abound, that the bard catches flashes of his 'dear lass' in the trunks of old trees while supposedly dealing with her beauty raises a paradoxically wrinkled and contorted image. This keeps the scene earthbound, the 'hures o Reekie' are implicit from the first, death and decay are inherent even in beauty, a strange beauty too is found here in decay and death itself. Nothing is as it

seems in *Under The Eildon Tree*, the aura of the 'Queen o fair Elfland' pervades.

## 4

Such stylistic convolutions then, with their attendant propensities for underlying paradox serve to build up a complex and comprehensive texture, context and framework. However, the accumulations continue: beyond the diverse tangents of modernism, lyricism, surrealism, mediaevalism, bawdy Villonesque realism, the classical, mythological and 'autobiographical' we come to the question of the nature of the realities constructed for and inhabited by these impassioned lovers. This area draws in another central thematic and symbolic strand and derives from a sense here of history unfurling, a technique as we have seen, employed in prototypical form in 'The Wanderer':

- And Dian's siller chastitie  
 Muved owre the reikan lums,  
 Biggan a ferlie toun o jet and ivorie  
 That was but blackened stane  
 Whar Bothwell rade and Huntly  
 And fair Montrose and aa the lave  
 Wi silken leddies doun til the grave.  
 - The hoofs strak siller on the causie!  
 And I mysel in cramasie!

(U.E.T., p. 42)

This type of catalogue is a characteristic of the poem, yet for all that transience is a central issue it is also clear, typically contrarily, that nothing truly significant really changes. The diverse characters inhabit the same waste land, the subjective hinterlands of 'The figures i the reik' cited earlier, compounded by more overt images of desolation: whether those of classical Armageddon, as the poet in Antony's guise stalks 'among the acres o smouchteran grieshoch' (XXII. p. 61), or in objectively contemporary times with a hellish halo, stumbling amid the nuclear devastation of his 'own' time:

Our hands become electric til the touch  
 And the causie brunt and smouchteran ahint oor feet.

(II. p. 16)

In many respects an inversion of the modernist technique of Pound in *Mauberley* or *Propertius* where classicism functions as nodes of permanence, here Goodsir Smith is much more ambivalent when not in direct contrast. Each of these scenarios resonate, the one from the other, a picking up of stitches, each in turn clearly symbolising subjective states: '-And weill I ken that this fey extacie / Is nocht but Luv's Hiroshima'. Whatever the temporal context the lover exists 'Weirdit' by the oppressiveness and comprehensiveness of passion, 'set apert for ruin' (U.E.T., ii, p. 16). Though scenes may seem to shift the symbolically subjective zone remains one of desolation, transience ironically evoked in terms of constants.

Aspects such as these though go deeper still, the transmutations and accumulations of related strata never stop. In the ninth elegy the pulsating inner-landscape relentlessly assembling focuses on confusion and inner-turmoil in uncompromisingly symbolic terms hinged around landscape:

Your hair a midnight forest  
 Thrang  
 Wi the greitan dirl,  
 The schere sang-spate o rossignels-  
 While the great gowden ernes  
 That rule my saul  
 Like princes o the bluid  
 Scove throu the thrawan harns  
 On what fell errand I ken nocht  
 Nor you, my ain, my sleepan,  
 Saft, born-skaithit hert.

(U.E.T., p. 27)

This is already an inner monologue and the subjective symbolism employed takes us a further step from an objective reality already construed as microcosmic in significance. The two lovers providing the elegy's objective focus lie on a patch of grass and as reflections unfold and intensify that focal point becomes a place in which 'aa the world is skrunken'. That patch of grass furthermore is located beneath 'a runkled tree', like the Eildon Tree itself, a point of transition to strange realms for True Thomas. Whether 'throu the thrawan harns' or through 'red blude to the knee'.<sup>8</sup> The places, subjectively speaking, poets have to go and to know, then to return and tell.



## 5

This kind of micro/macro, subjective/objective flux is central to the poem and is deployed in a number of deviant forms. Elegy thirteen provides an intriguing example while suggesting further tangents at work. This section of the poem centres on an impressive cityscape, Edinburgh at night from the air. The city's stony inertness is animated, partly because the roving ariel perspective itself gives an illusion of broader motions, partly, as the lens wheels in 'The lums o the reikan toun' gradually yield an actual animacy. Illuminated windows veer into focus, perspective cuts into open space with the windows imaged as 'nakit yalla sterne' (XIII. p. 41), catching at once the night space and the density of habitation. The correlation of individual windows with individual stars also forms a link with the activities in every room to the potential significances of that 'wee gair'.

This last point becomes more apparent as Goodsir Smith goes on to imbue the flickering windows with a sexually allusive dimension: 'Out an in and out again,' (XIII. p. 41) a symbolically sexual heliograph. Such connotations are unmistakable, partly because of the explicitly sexual context established in XIII i-iii, partly because of the way in which XIII iv is developed, the population of the city-scape being envisaged all tenaciously involved:

The haill toun at it  
Aa the lichts pip-poppan  
In and out and in again.

(U.E.T., p. 41)

The view is that of a sectioned ant-hill from above, adding a further element to the animacy of this sequence. These perspectives, observations, images function as subjective indices to the sexually concerned psyche of this narrator, the oozing sexuality perceived by him as integral to every facet of reality being symptomatic of that concern. From the basically suggestive the angles spiral and connotations are made explicit:

I' the buts an bens  
And single ends,  
The banks and braes

O' the toueran cliffs o lands,  
Haill tenements, wards and burghs, counties,  
Regalities and jurisdictiones,  
Continents and empires  
Gien ower entire  
Til the joukerie-poukerie!  
Hech, sirs, whatna feck of fockerie!

(U.E.T., pp. 41-42)

The allusion to Burns here is important too, 'The banks and braes', functioning as a time-tie, linking the poet of *these* lines to the sexual orientation of Burns in an earlier era – just as Antony or Orpheus surface in the weave in other areas. The concluding lines of this section lay the image bare:

My bonie Edinburrie,  
Auld Skulduggerie!  
Flat on her back sevin nichts o the week,  
Earnan her breid wi her hurdies' sweit.

(U.E.T., p. 42)

Here Goodsir Smith deals intriguingly with topography in anatomical terms recalling the the promiscuous Sandra. Appropriately enough in the succeeding section of this elegy we are returned explicitly to Sandra with the technique inverted, the anatomical dealt with in topographical terms. Section six of elegy thirteen opens on an image of Sandra, asleep and inert as the city in the preceding section:

There Sandra sleepan, like a doe shot  
I' the midnight wuid –

(U.E.T., p. 42)

But as with the city, there is an immediate escalation:

– wee paps  
Like munes, mune-aipples gaithert  
I' the Isles o Youth.

(U.E.T., p. 42)

and from this point her limbs are spread like a map:

A paradisal archipelagie  
 Inhaudan divers bays, lagoons,  
 Great corses, strands and sounds,  
 Islands and straits, peninsulies,  
     Whar traders, navigators,  
     Odyssean gangrels, gubernators,  
     Mutineers and maister-mariners,  
 And aa sic outland chieles micht utilise wi ease  
 Cheap flowered claithes and beads,  
 Gawds, wire and sheenan nails  
     And siclike flichtmafletherie  
 In fair and just excambion  
 For aa the ferlies o the southren seas  
 That chirm in thy deep-dernit creeks.

(U.E.T., p. 42-3)

Sandra's body is expanded and presented as crawling with her would-be manipulators: as heavily populated as the city of the preceding section. Here the vast is codified in terms of the small which is in turn codified in terms of the vast. In symbolic terms once more, Smith is juggling with the microcosmic and macrocosmic, paralleling the subjective and objective – the one inside the other and vice-versa. Each can mirror and illuminate, just as a single cell carries all the information for the structuring of the entire organism. From star to planet, to city, to village, house, body, mind and back. In sections like these, inner consciousness and objective realities veer, sway and mingle, further manifestations of the 'weirdit' landscapes of lover, poet or 'Odyssean gangrel'.

## 6

One further aspect in the area of juxtaposition is central to the poem. Although I have drawn on aspects of style, symbolism and structure I have said little concerning more essentially technical constituents of the verse itself. This brings us to Goodsir Smith's manipulation of various rhetorical modes, a technique which functions, in expansive terms, in much the same way as the ironic juxtaposition of diverse vocabulary.

There are distinctive examples of this approach riddling the poem. In elegy fourteen (ii) there is the incorporation of epic simile:

The lowe, the damned, the bricht, aye-burnan,  
Inextinguishable lowe  
Was citadelled, of course, i the hert.  
There, was its keep and donjon dour,  
Its battlementit waas, its oubliettes,  
Its dernit vennels, drawbrig and the lave!  
– The hert!  
The bruckle pith o hit!  
– -As I kent aa the while!

(U.E.T., p. 45)

Similarly and in typically devious fashion this is preceded in part one of this elegy with the rhetoric of the mock heroic:

I teuk the Syrens til Calypso's Isle for companie  
And swacked my wey throu aa the Cyclades,  
Was pitten out frae Tara Haas  
And tummlit flouerie Capri i the sea;  
The tapless touers o Ilium we burned again,  
And Camelot hapt aa her virgins under key,  
We leuch, and Bulls of Bashan couldna droun  
Our maist mellifluous cacophonie – !

(U.E.T., p. 44)

This though is immediately undercut as Goodsir Smith adds: '–And muckle mair i the like strain / Wi the whilk I winna deave ye nou'. Again, contextually, this functions in the same way as the juxtapositions of vocabulary. In the example above Goodsir Smith not only mocks his use of the mock heroic (and heroic) he mocks his mockery of the mock heroic. Cheekily too as we have seen, he *does* go on with 'muckle mair i the like strain' on the subsequent page with his excursions into the epic.

Such essentially self-satiric qualities are integral to the poem as they were to the man, for if intolerant of the pretentious and crass in others, he was equally critical with regard to his own work, rigorously structuring his poetry to defuse the pitfalls of pretension and to twist them to serve his own ends. If perfectly capable of playing up to (and upon) his allotted role of 'boozy bard', his tongue was kept cocked and stored firmly in his cheek, he had no time for poets' posturing.

Throughout *Under The Eildon Tree* that preponderance constantly comes to the fore. When 'The Bard', a marginally more sober manifestation of 'Slugabed' comments that he is 'excessive in aathing' (II i p. 14) the reference is as much to stylistic excess as to the emotional or alcoholic. In this respect, a central tactic employed by Goodsir Smith to deflate some of his overly romantic or melodramatic leanings is a prevalent use of parenthesis. In elegy twenty-two there are the strains of the old, archetypal and clichéd poet's paranoia: 'And the silence may come swith on me / And the wild leid nae mair tak wing' (U.E.T., p. 61). But this is immediately undermined in an aside, '(For bards are subjeck til sic haps)' (U.E.T., p. 61), a distinctly utilitarian voice following on the heels of the impassioned. Such jerks are administered again and again, in elegy twenty-two (iii) a passage expressing incomprehension faced with the mass of paradox his subject entails is terminated with '(Rhetoric! / Juist sheer damned / Rhetoric!' (U.E.T., p. 62), Goodsir Smith's position constantly switches.

The fanciful concept of the poet's role in society is ridiculed in a similar fashion. Considering the question of a poet's appropriate subject matter the bard enumerates some of those roles: 'The Antennae o the Race', / 'The Unacknowledged Legislators', / 'Sperits o the Time' (U.E.T., p. 22). The capitalisation and quotation marks here already signal irony at play and we are left in no doubt as he goes on, '— and sae furth, / As some enthusiasts hae observed / Frae time til time in moments o exultatioun / Or euphoria / Sequant til the drinkan o wine maistlikelie' (U.E.T., p. 22). Just as we have seen that that 'Rhetoric!' can be twisted to yield fresh meanings and layers of significance, so too here, Goodsir Smith's consideration of subjects and roles assume a comprehensive seriousness rendering the adoption of a pose facile, a point made, with further irony, by superimposing pose on pose. There is an almost uncomfortable psychological awareness underpinning this poem. Levels of awareness within levels of awareness, like Chinese boxes, masks under masks, yet each mask is pertinent to the total poem and to the make-up of the poem's guiding sensibility.

## 7

'Masks' themselves are important in enabling Goodsir Smith to explore many levels of paradox central both to the poem and to his own diverse personality. This area centres around the recruitment of various

personae – a technique Goodsir Smith cannot resist – Stalin, Oblomov, Knox, paralleled with one or another of his own guises as a mode of broadening the poem's socio-political perspective. The subject is broached early in the poem with an apparent declaration to the muse, love personified. He writes off war and peace, 'dour debate' and political concerns as topics and goes on to proclaim:

You are my subjeck anerlie, there is nae ither  
Fills my musardie,

(U.E.T., p. 15)

But the subject is by no means forgotten and is returned to in the fifth elegy. This opens with a satirical self-portrait as 'Sydney Slugabed Godless Smith', the poet as bohemian decadent:

- Oblomov has nocht til lear me,  
And Oblomov has nocht on me,  
Liggan my lane in bed at nune,  
Gantan at gray, December haar,  
A cauld, scummie, hauf-drunk cup o tea  
At my bed-side,  
Luntan Virginian fags  
- The New Warld thus I haud in fief  
And levie kindlie tribute. Black men slave  
Aneth a distant sun to mak for me  
Cheroots at hauf-a-croun the box.  
Wi ase on the sheets, ase on the cod,  
And crumbs o toast under my bum,  
Scrievan the last great coronach  
O' the Westren flickeran bourgeois warld.

(U.E.T., p. 20)

Aside from satirising an image Goodsir Smith was happy to play along with, as much carapace as joke, that he recognises this as yet another manifestation of the clichés hung around poets' necks is implicit, with these lines following hard on the heels of: '(Cliche! / Echo answers Clichy!' from elegy four. That conclusion colours the whole of elegy five and while that is exemplary and expansive in itself and serves to further the narrative movement it also casts its shadow on elegy four and establishes a developed contextual level for elegy six.

The opening lines from 'Slugabed' however are also our introduction to Oblomov as fellow decadent and establish a parallel between the two. In addition these lines also illustrate the poet's basic contempt for the wide-ranging implications of capitalist consumerism. Barbs in that direction though are not limited to 'the Westren Flickeran bourgeois world' alone as 'Slugabed' goes on to expand his commentary and addresses Stalin, imagining the lecture he and his western world's degeneracy would precipitate. The scenario is inherently absurd as Goodsir Smith envisages Stalin banging at his front door in Edinburgh and him wrecked in bed for the visit. The absurdity though also rubs off on Stalin and mocks his assumption of stern morality. This aspect is heightened as 'Slugabed' continues: 'Losh, what a sermon yon wad be! / For Knox has nocht on Uncle Joe / And Oblomov has nocht on Smith' (U.E.T., p. 21). Parallel and contrast made explicit, the two solemn sermonisers set beside the two dedicated decadents. The broadening continues here as Goodsir Smith draws in an allusion to the 'East-West synthesis' embraced by MacDiarmid:

And sae we come by a route maist devious  
 Til the far-famed Aist-West Synthesis!  
 Beluv'd by Hugh that's beluv'd by me  
 And the baith o us loe the barley-bree-  
 But wha can afford til drink the stuff?  
 Certes no auld Oblomov!  
 -And yet he does! Whiles  
 But no as muckle as Uncle Joe - I've smaa dout!

(U.E.T., p. 21)

So Stalin, and by association Knox, soon to be categorised as a fornicator, is portrayed not only as a dedicated drinker but damned as a hypocrite in view of his calculatedly stern image. The qualities of the poet supersede, if only because the 'Slugabed' at least acknowledges his failings, an acknowledgement requiring more than a pinch of salt, for mendacity in one form or another is one of the many things this poem is about. In this way too, the direct allusion to MacDiarmid by name above further confuses the barriers between the poetic and the autobiographical.

This all adds up to a fair amount of aesthetic high-jinks for a poet claiming 'love' as his only subject, and for all that, he won't leave politics alone either. As we reach elegy six we are lambasted with an exposition



of heavy irony on the fatuous, sycophantic and self-serving nature of the political arena:

And trulie there are maitters o great moment  
 Abraid the day.  
 Aa the great michtie  
 In their great seats are warslan  
 For anither cushion maybe  
 Or mair licht  
 Or the table  
 A wee thing nearer til the great hand,  
 Or mair cigars, or better anes,  
 Brandie, usquebae  
 Or what hae ye.

(U.E.T., p. 22)

The dominance of the politician's drive to self-gratification (and the later allusions to Hiroshima indicate that Goodsir Smith is well aware *that* is more sinister than a desire for 'mair Cigars'), as opposed to any concern for human welfare or constructive order is further drawn home with images of the political man with fevered brow at the prospect of further private profit. The conclusion drawn here reaches beyond irony to outright sarcasm:

*En effet*, maist serious maitters  
 O' great argument til consider maist earnestlie  
 And seriouslie.

(U.E.T., p. 23)

Through the East-West axes supplied in Knox/Stalin, Slugabed/Oblomov Goodsir Smith disparages international politics as a whole, the distinctions a matter of terminology and the same facile concerns providing the bottom line in either context. Such concerns are treated as transient, 'I dout there's neer a Czar / Can ding us down for aye', (U.E.T., p. 24), dangerous distractions and side-shows from concern with and development of the fully human. In a distant echo far down the poem Goodsir Smith identifies Cupid as the *actual* 'Tyrant and Czar Ultimate!' (XXII ii p. 62): just as those subjective landscapes telescoping time, the many intricate tangents of love transcend the doctrinal and utilitarian to touch on deeper zones of human-Being and activity.

## 8

The use of characterisation discussed above points towards the existence of a broader, multi-purpose spectrum of personae populating the expanse of the poem as a whole. You do not have to delve too deeply into classical references to begin to trace a formidable transection building around cross-reference, parallel, contrast, juxtaposition and allusion which threatens to swamp assimilation. Even tentative investigations in this area though also illustrate the considerable care Goodsir Smith has taken in assembling his cast. The various personae nonetheless do begin to resolve themselves into categories which clarify the nature of their interweaving. There are four main areas here providing a viable framework for a detailed study of their various functions and implications.

In elegy twenty Goodsir Smith, in the guise of Tristram, writes of 'The life o bard and warrior, no wi the custom / O' bydan hame o nichts or keepan hoose by day' (U.E.T., p. 57). These are the parameters defining the main male protagonists of *Under The Eildon Tree*. Each either bard or warrior or both although in many cases they share other primary characteristics: notorious wanderers, the exploration of strange realms, to experience banishment.

In many respects elegies twelve (on Orpheus and Euridice) and thirteen (on Slugabed and Sandra) constitute the narrative heart of this poem and as in any respectable circulatory system, the heart has its tributaries to the furthest reaches of the whole organism. Elegy twelve consolidates the poem's first tentative and exploratory movement with thirteen marking the commencement of the second substantive movement: these in turn are crossed and coloured by numerous sub-stratal movements.

These elegies also provide the central point of parallel and contrast. Both Orpheus and Slugabed are poets, Orpheus whose 'kinrick was the hert, / The passions and the saul', matching the Slugabed who, in 'serious' voice, writes of Artemis, 'You are my subjeck anerlie, there is nae ithar / Fills my musardie'. Similarly Orpheus' excursion to the underworld, '(Gray mauchie Hades, lichtless airt)' (U.E.T., p. 35) parallels Slugabed's 'junketins' through the 'wastage-land' (U.E.T., p. 39). To step deeper in, the Slugabed's excursions too comprise '-Sevin nichts and sevin days' (U.E.T., p. 38), which resonates with True Thomas whose own excursions to another underworld lasted seven years.

True Thomas as well as Tannhäuser and Ulysses are explicitly invoked in elegy twenty-three, offering further paralleled situations. Tannhäuser

in the cave palace of the Queen of love and beauty who, like Thomas, vanished from the earth, Ulysses on his odyssey is imprisoned in the caves of Polyphemus, captivated by Calypso for seven years – and subsequently visits Hades, bringing us back to Orpheus. The Slugabed also comments of his seven day binge, '(A modest bout when aa's dune, / Maist scriptural, in fack)', neatly Burnsian in its irreverence and Burns too is among the cast, his ill-fated liaison with Highland Mary the subject of elegy ten. Burns too faced ostracism on diverse social fronts, banishment of a kind. Had he actually absconded to Jamaica with Mary his incorporation here would have been perfect. Even though if this constitutes only metaphorical banishment each of the excursions cited above are equally so: caves of all kinds prompting speculations on subjective contexts.

Other wandering bards and warriors are drawn into the complex, Cuchulain in elegy fifteen, who abandons Eimhir for Fann and Tir-nan-Og (another species of underworld) just as Ulysses abandons Penelope and subsequently Calypso, so too in turn Cuchulain abandons Fann. Aeneas, who abandons Dido to pursue *his* adventures features in elegy sixteen while Sir Tristram, lover of Iseult and banished by his uncle is the subject of elegy twenty. In elegy twenty-two we find Antony, yet another adventurer who abandons his wife Octavia for the charms of Cleopatra – in this instance with Egypt correlating to the diverse hinterlands and wonderlands. Finally the bard himself stravaigin the night streets of 'Edinburgh' with Sandra, except, we don't, and it's tempting to speculate, find out who *he* has left.

## 9

The three subsequent groupings of characters are in one way or another concomitant to those outlined above but deal with divergent aspects of the repercussions or implications stemming from these initial scenarios. The second grouping is of those characters who are abandoned or destroyed by their loves or lovers. Dido for one dies by her own hand as a consequence of Aeneas's desertion:

Yon nicht the lift owre Carthage bleezed  
And Dian's siller disc was dim  
As Dido and her palace burned,

The oranger, scarlet, gowden lowes  
Her ae wild protest til the centuries.

(U.E.T., p. 50)

Similarly in the twentieth elegy Tristram is portrayed dying on 'a barren strand' another dubious landscape, dying as much from his separation as from his 'skaith', always an ambiguous term in Goodsir Smith's work. This elegy echoes the earlier scene in elegy seven, 'I had a luve' in which two lovers watch the departure of a ship. Now, deep in the poem Tristram *awaits* a ship bearing Iseult. A correlation lent force as we reach elegy twenty-one which in turn echoes the epiphanous qualities of elegy seven while tying to twenty in that it too is set in the aftermath of events.

Elegy twenty also offers its offshoots:

– Iseult, my hert's hert –  
Sae what's the odds?  
A hart has skaithit me:  
Will the hart bring me my hert  
Here at the endin o a waefu tale?

(U.E.T., pp. 57-58)

This conjures a further candidate, Actaeon, transformed to a stag, aptly enough by Diana/Artemis – and by implication, slain by that same Diana/Artemis to whom *Under The Eildon Tree* is addressed. The succeeding line too, 'There's a conundrum Merlin!' mocks the preceding word-play, while, with equally blatant artifice, implicating Merlin – who died spellbound by his mistress Vivian. Not too surprisingly in a hawthorn bush, Walter Scott referred to True Thomas as 'the Merlin of Scotland' and both Merlin and Thomas are ensnared under their respective trees.

The echoes accumulate relentlessly, Tristram's 'Daith is daith. / And life is daith wantan the anerlie life I want,' (XX. p. 57) picks up from the earlier words of the bard, pointing up the parallel: 'O' life in daith / And daith in daith,' (IV. p. 18). Characteristically, just as these lines are immediately jeered at in the 'Cliche!' section of elegy four so too in twenty Goodsir Smith disparages his use of such echoing as a technique with: 'Anither echo! The oracles are guid indeed,' (XX. p. 58).

There are many other victims incorporated in *Under The Eildon Tree*, slipping up through time; Lissaura, the mistress of Tannhäuser, there's Calypso, Euridice, Eimhir and Fann along with Octavia and Cleopatra.

In more contemporary terms beyond the mythic strata (well, almost) the incorporation of Burns' mistress Highland Mary with Jean Amour completes another triangle.

Goodsir Smith builds in further resonances here for as Burns' returns, as he did, to Jean Amour after Mary's death the narrator pronounces, 'Naxos for Ithaca – what then!' (X. i. p. 29), which correlates to further complex triangles. 'Naxos', an Aegean island where Dionysius was said to have found Ariadne when deserted by Theseus, while 'Ithaca' too was an island, this time in the Ionian Sea reputed to be the birthplace of Ulysses, so again we find the Penelope/Calypso context. These islands also recall the island haven of Tristram in elegy twenty.

The third grouping relates to the various destructive or potentially destructive qualities of certain characters paralleling those more dangerous aspects of the warrior/bards of category one, or indeed precipitating those aspects. Central to this category are the enchantments symbolised by Diana/Artemis, the 'Queen o fair Elfland' and Tannhäuser's 'queen of love and beauty'. These are paralleled by the equally dangerous and pervasive presences of Aengus (Eros) and Cupid. Co-existing with such essentially symbolic personae there are those who employ their enchantments in a corrupt manner.

The more lustful and potentially destructive concomitant of love is personified in the likes of Fann in the fifteenth elegy while Fann's 'opposite number' Eimhir provides one of the few straightforward positive forces in the poem. The duality apparent is all pervasive as Goodsir Smith goes on to incorporate, in addition to Fann, Calypso, Vivian, Cressida, Cleopatra and Slugabed's, Sandra (with certain reservations with regard to the latter). Goodsir Smith provides male counterparts on this level in Aristaeus and, by involving Cressida, Diomedes, while many of those mentioned in category one such as Orpheus and Aeneas are significant in this context too, overlaps are the order of the day with this whole sequence.

Finally in this area, there is the invocation of Messaline in the eighteenth elegy, who with, 'Her deidlie aye-unsteicht desire, / Clipped til her pyson-drappan paps / O cauld, cauld alabaister,' (XVIII. p. 53), provides a stark contrast to the 'White Unmortal Queyne' of elegy one. Messaline, the ultimate whore, death the only outroad, at once perpetual and inescapable, 'None ever flees her, nane / Escapes, no ever ane.' (XVIII. p. 53). In effect the characters, whether mythological, literary or 'real' enact their lives in the spaces between the extremes symbolised by Diana and Messaline, extremes which the various personae embody within

themselves, a further illustration of the Janus face of love enmeshing our lives in perpetual paradox.

There is a resigned tone to elegy eighteen in that it deals on one level with an aspect of human nature which none of us can escape while, on another, it rams home the equal inevitability of death. There is an interesting use of allusive echoing here in the elegy's opening lines:

Wearie, wearie, nou I dwyne,  
 I' the westren pend my starne declynes;  
 Aince enfielt theres nae release  
 Frae Luvie but Strumpet Daith's embrace  
 – And I maun seek her sune  
 Gin my luvie winna hae me mair.

(U.E.T. p. 53)

These lines, both in terms of content and rhythm, echo these lines from John Davidson's 'The Last Journey' (from *The Testament of John Davidson*).

My feet are heavy now, but on I go.  
 My head erect beneath the tragic years.  
 The way is steep, but I would have it so;  
 And dusty, but I lay the dust with tears,  
 Though none can see me weep: alone I climb  
 The rugged path that leads me out of time –  
 Out of time and out of all.

This correlation, intentional or otherwise (I'd say the former), bearing in mind the eventual suicide of Davidson, serves to provide some particularly eery subliminal resonations which are characteristic of some of the darker moments to be found in the latter half of the poem.

Category four can be summarised briefly, being largely the obverse of three and a concomitant or extension of two, dealing with those enchanted or enslaved either by Artemis or Messaline (sometimes both) and who in one way or another end up adrift in the hinterland which spans the two. Centrally there is the Bard, our guide from Artemis to Sandra, the ideal to the all too real, and True Thomas who provides an omnipresent allegorical ground-base leading us around mirror images of our own realities on his travels with the 'queen o fair Elfland'. Other characters function as adjuncts exemplifying the various levels through which we are led, in this context Tanhauser, Merlin, Ulysses

are equally enchanted and led astray while Aeneas, Cuchulain, Cressida and Orpheus illustrate, more forcefully, various aspects and levels of corruption or corruptibility. Aspects such as these though are in some respects only the multiple tips of a very large and strange iceberg which, given the importance of this poem both in terms of Goodsir Smith's work and its significance in the development of twentieth century Scottish literature requires a more intensive level of examination and in Chapter Four we can move on to take a closer look at what Goodsir Smith is doing with this assembly and at some of the related and intricate areas into which these inroads lead before presenting an overview of the poem, its nature and broader significance in the context of the evolution of twentieth century Scottish literature.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TWA BACKIT BEAST<sup>1</sup>

#### I

With the cast assembled, and there is ample scope in the poem by which it could be enlarged, we can turn to consider certain examples in more detail in order to clarify *why* they are all here and to what specific ends Goodsir Smith is guiding them (and us). The latticeworks of cross-reference and allusion lead on to more deep-bedded and complex areas from those discussed in Chapter Three for, as the examples there suggest, each character is multi-faceted and significant to various different levels of the poem.

The two central elegies (XII and XIII), provide one of the most fruitful areas through which to develop the groundwork above. The lamentations of Orpheus in elegy twelve are in various ways construed by Goodsir Smith as a narrative self-analysis or confession. Orpheus appears to accept the blame for Euridicie's death:

But yet was my negleck that did the deed;  
Neither was I by her to proteck  
Frae the dernit serpent's bane  
Green and secret i the raff gerss liggan  
- I was her daith as she was life til me.

(XII. ii. p. 35)

In the same way Orpheus can observe of himself:

-Anerlie my ain sel I coudna bend.  
'He was his ain warst enemy,'  
As the auld untentit bodachs say-

(XII. i. p. 34)

Looking more closely at Orpheus' confessions it is possible to become very quickly suspicious of the underlying psychology of his character. For one thing the whole 'confession' is riddled with disclaimers. He admits for instance his carnal inclinations:

I, daffan, i the groves and pools  
 Wi the water-lassies,  
 Riggish, ree, and aye as fain  
 For lemanrie as Orpheus was,

(XII. ii. p. 35)

Yet there are inbuilt asides which reek of self-justification: 'Tho I was feckless born and lemanous' (XII. ii. p. 35), in effect, nothing to do with me *really*, I was just *born* that way. Or again, of his lusting and rambling, Orpheus states he was:

Seekan sensatiouns, passions that wad wauken  
 My Muse whan she was lollish.

(XII. i. p. 34)

So, it was all in the cause of 'Art' and therefore justifiable. In itself this is a related jibe at the poetic posturing mocked by the Slugabed. There are a number of contradictory claims here, in a further disclaimer Orpheus says:

No seendil the hert was kinnelt like a forest-bleeze . . .  
 I was nae maister o my ain but thirlit  
 Serf til his ramskeerie wants

(XII i p. 34)

Yet only a dozen lines before this, Orpheus claims 'the hert' as *his* kingdom – not a realm in which he is 'Serf'.

Orpheus also ascribes his fate to forces outwith himself, 'The jealous gods sae cast my weird' (XII ii p. 35), All of which undermines the veracity of the apparently confessional tone. There is a good deal more here to bear in mind, as Orpheus observes (and Goodsir Smith nudges every hand) 'Ye ken the tale' (XII. iii. p. 35) and if you don't, you can take this as an explicit instruction to go and get to know it. The tale of Orpheus is a complex business, it depends on who you read and how you read the various implications.

Orpheus himself says that ' . . . yon Aristaeus loed my queyne' (XII. ii. p. 35), 'loed' as opposed to lust or desire explicitly, and that 'dernit serpent's bane' can be symbolically ambiguous so that the scenario can be inverted. Euridicie can be marked as temptress rather than victim (and both Cresseid and Dido can be interpreted similarly) while Orpheus

and Aristaeus become the hapless victims as opposed to oppressors.

The inherent ambiguities involved are central to the paradoxical nature of love itself. With regard to ambiguity it is worthwhile drawing on a further significant tangent, the cross-reference of *Under The Eildon Tree* with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. One example of this cross-reference in particular is pertinent to an assessment of Orpheus.

At the conclusion of act four of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony-characteristically having messed up his own suicide ('How? not dead? not dead? - ') observes:

Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony  
But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself.

(*Complete Works* (Alexander) p. 1189)

to which Cleopatra retorts with (unconscious?) irony:

So it should be, that none but  
Antony  
Should conquer Antony . . .

(*Complete Works* (Alexander) p. 1189.)

That these lines are mirrored in Orpheus' 'Anerlie my ain sel I couldna bend' (XII. i. p. 34) is no coincidence. Goodsir Smith's use of ambiguity and irony is as cutting as Shakespeare's with as much between the lines as on them in *Under The Eildon Tree* and Goodsir Smith mocks Orpheus for his black despair and patent ineptitude as surely as Shakespeare does Antony.

This portrayal of Orpheus then is intrinsically satirical, the (initially) untampered with scenario is ultimately and characteristically defused as we find 'The sycophantic gods, ulyied and curlit, / Reclynan i the bar on bright Olympus,' (XII. iii. p. 36), a levity and absurdity that mocks the gravity both of Orpheus and the elegy itself. That Orpheus then observes that Jupiter possesses an 'infantile perfectit sense / O' the dramatic', (XII. iii. p. 36), only serves to ram home the irony, for it was due to very similar character traits, his decadence, self-esteem and vanity ('There wasna my maik upo the yerth / (Why suld I no admit the fack?)) (XII. i. p. 34), that landed him in the Shades in the first place. That he responds thus to his treatment in the hands of the gods, which parallels his own treatment of Euridicie on earth, only serves to compound his folly.

Orpheus notes, 'Och gie the gods their due / They ken what they're about' (XII. iii. p. 36), as he himself patently obviously does not. Having become suspicious of Orpheus, other aspects of his tale become questionable, for instance did he really look back because 'hert ruled heid again' (XII. iii. p. 37), or was there a certain lack of faith on his part that Euridicie would follow him? All in all a dubious tale which assumes its full significance when considered in relation to the succeeding thirteenth elegy, the Slugabed's tale, which casts back further aspersions on the true nature of Orpheus.

## 2

In this elegy a Villonesque realism and bluntness supersedes a more overt, if black, humour. That these are realms as strange and bizarre in their way as the Shades of Orpheus in XII, or anywhere in the travels of True Thomas, is nonetheless indicated by the proximity of 'The Fun Fair and Museum o Monstrosities, / The Tyke-faced Loun, the Conjuror's Den / And siclike' (XII. i. p. 38). Urban (sur)realism supersedes the mythological pseudo-gravity of XII, but if the juxtapositions are important it is still clear that there are parallels too. For Slugabed's excursions among the 'howffs and dancins, stews / And houses o assignatioun / I' the auntient capital' (XIII. ii. p. 39), identify components of a contemporary Orpheus boozing and whoring his way around Edinburgh, a fully-fledged up to date bohemian Hades yet still with intriguing Mediaeval echoes.

The two poets have more in common than their basic decadence. Slugabed's attitude to the 'Cup bearer' on refusal of 'The provision of further refreshment' (XIII. ii. p. 34), betrays a vanity paralleling Orpheus' exposition on his poetic merits, for the refusal, Slugabed writes, was phrased ' -Rochlie' and ' . . . in a menner / Wi the whilk I amna used' (XIII. ii. p. 34). That refusal precipitates a catalogue detailing the Slugabed's standing, as lofty in relative terms as any made by Orpheus:

Uncomformable wi my lordlie spreit,  
A menner unseemlie, unbefittan  
The speakin-til or interlocutioun  
O' a Bard and Shennachie,  
Far less a Maister o Arts,  
- The whilk rank and statioun I haud

(XIII. ii. pp. 39-40)

Such aspects are emphasised as Slugabed goes on to regale the barman with mock, undisguised, intellectual arrogance:

Aa the whilk was made sufficient plain  
 Til the Cup-bearer at the time-  
     Losh me, what a collieshangie!  
 Ye'd hae thocht the man affrontit  
     Deeplie, maist mortallie  
     And til the hert.  
 Ay, and I cried him Ganymede,  
     Wi the whilk address or pronomen  
     He grew incensed.  
 'Run, Ganymede!' quo I,  
 'Stay me wi flagons!'

(XIII. ii. p. 40)

Slugabed also stated that his tale is unravelled for '... the benefit / O' future putative historians' (XIII. ii. p. 39), which intimates his conviction that his activities will obviously be of interest to future generations.

Such examples paralleling the Orpheus elegy work to illustrate the timeless truths inherent to Orpheus' tangled tale, for in his way Slugabed is as subjectively damaged, the cumulative effect indicated by their mutual defects, by his involvement with lust/love as Orpheus. The basic realism of elegy thirteen enhances the sense of timelessness, for although the two characters encounter similar disjunctions the contemporary scenario brings the ideas implicit closer to our own experience, so enhancing and reframing our reading of elegy twelve.

Beyond this level the juxtapositions begin to leave their mark for Slugabed scores higher in the self-awareness stakes than Orpheus. He can recognise and accept his own and his world's reality and latent absurdity, accept its dangers and the likelihood of defeat, disease and disenchantment. He mocks his MA in the course of flaunting it, it was obtained he writes:

In consequence and by vertue  
 O' unremittan and pertinacious  
 Applicatioun til the bottle  
 Ower a period no exceedan  
 Fowr year and sax munce or moneths

(The latter bean a *hiatus* or *caesura*  
For the purposes o rustication  
Or *villeggiatura* 'at my place in the country'):

(XIII. ii. p. 40)

Goodsir Smith mocks his poetic role in the same way, acknowledging its pointlessness and destructiveness, portraying himself as, 'Purple as Tiberio wi bad rum and beerio' (XIII. ii. p. 38), which is not exactly a narcissistic self-image. Of his drinking habits he also notes, ' - But I digress, / It was rum, I mynd the nou, rum was the bree, / Rum and draucht Bass. / -Sheer *hara - kirt!*' (XIII. ii. p. 40), neither an elegant nor a particularly safe concoction designed to promote longevity. Also in Slugabed's favour is his capacity to see beneath the veneer to identify and assimilate the co-existence of loveliness or desirability with ugliness, he displays no squeamishness in seeing Sandra as,

-My Helen douce as aipple-jack  
That cack't the bed in exstasie.

(XIII. v. p. 43)

Because he recognises both the inevitableness and the fundamental rightness of the conjunction the apparent incongruity does not repel him, on the contrary - 'Ah, belle nostalgie de la boue!' (XIII. v.p. 43). Elegy thirteen ends with realistic if fatalistic recognition of the possible consequences of his delving in 'la boue',

And maybe tae the pox -  
Ach, weill!

(XIII. v. p. 43)

It takes Goodsir Smith's sleight of hand to defuse Orpheus and that occurs between the lines, in Slugabed's case it is on the lines. But if Slugabed is an existential survivor in a way Orpheus is not there is also the concomitant ring of nihilism in these lines. (Alexander Scott for one has noted 'an underlying grimness' to elegy thirteen which he sees as prefiguring 'a darkening in the latter half of the poem'.<sup>2</sup>) However Goodsir Smith may apply satire to the poems' bleaker components it does often seem only to isolate and emphasise a mask of genuine fear and/or pessimism. In biographical terms Valda Grieve's remarks

(I think to Nancy Gish) on MacDiarmid, Goodsir Smith and MacCaig's drinking only and specifically to get drunk come to mind. The poets' mutual fascination with bars does seem suggestive, providing at once the possibilities of social congress and alcoholic nullity, an appropriate paradox.

### 3

The Slugabed and Orpheus both serve in their different ways to illustrate all our susceptibilities to the personality disorders precipitated through subjection to the dichotomies epitomised by love and its many manifestations; defining the nature of our own inner-beings, a duality from which there are few outroads besides recognition.

Elegy thirteen does suggest one mode, albeit with self-destruction built in and attendant on the poems darker sub-strata. By placing themselves outwith the parameters of society, Sandra and Slugabed can enjoy, or indulge, a brief respite from the more complex issues inherent in developing and experiencing a deeper love in a relationship integral to mainline society. This side-step consists not only of immersal in alcohol and the carnal but of a mutual recognition of respective needs and a limiting of aspirations to that confined framework.

Sandra can offer Slugabed uncomplicated easement unattainable in the 'normal'sphere of society, Slugabed writes of Sandra as:

You that spierit me nae questions,  
 Spierit at me nocht,  
     Acceptit me and teuk me in  
     A guest o the house, nae less;  
 Teuk aa there was to gie  
     (And yon was peerie worth),  
 Gied what ye didna loss-

(XIII. v. p. 43)

Yet outside the 'dernit fleeman's-firth' of elegy thirteen the contradictions implicit to human complexity creep in to soil and confuse relationships:

Atween Calypso and Penelope,  
 Theres nocht is gien til ane



Thats frae the tither taen,  
Nae peerie pickle, jot or ocht –

(XVII. p. 51)

In this way Sandra differs from the Fanns, Calypsos and Cleopatras of the poem, she gives without losing and takes only what Slugabed is prepared to give. Such relief is only temporary, the casualty lists from such lifestyles are long and the substance of the relationships of debatable depth. Appropriately this is the subject of elegy fourteen in which the futility of attempting to avoid the responsibility of love through immersal in the carnal, in alcohol, in running of any denomination, is classed as ' . . . a hauf-baked air-drawn phantasie' (XIV. ii.p. 44), for, 'The febrid lends nocht auctoritie / And cullage-bag nocht but a base mechanical' (XIV. ii.pp. 44-5). Elegies twelve, thirteen and fourteen can in this respect form a self-sufficient sequence within the larger context of the poem as a whole. In the essentially carnal and selfish predilections of Orpheus, underlying his idealised love, and in the tenderness of Sluga-bed (for his genuine affection for Sandra, however tempered, rings more genuine than the desperate proclamations of Orpheus) which underlies his carnality and debauchery it can be seen that these two characters, each deluding themselves in their respective ways, are at base as Pound put it 'Wrong from the start'.<sup>3</sup>

Norman MacCaig has written of *Under The Eildon Tree* that, 'the poem develops by contradiction and agreement as any experience does'<sup>4</sup> and this kind of movement is central to the poem's structural unity. On a simpler level for instance elegy thirteen may be interpreted as exemplifying the rambling, dissolute life of Orpheus without Euridicie touched on in elegy twelve yet each in turn correlating to larger movements within the over-all structure of *Under The Eildon Tree*.

In fact the poem is so well woven that say, any four, any eight elegies may be chosen as focus and shown as performing separate often didactic functions as a group while also fulfilling the terms of their contract to the poem in its entirety. Such segmentations can be endless and are invariably fruitful and enlightening, revealing strata on strata of potential significance and further illustrating the space and complexity of the work.

By comparing, contrasting and superimposing the varied experiences and situations of various characters then Goodsir Smith manages to explore his many themes comprehensively and, at once, subjectively and objectively. In the discussions above a number of these themes

have begun to emerge and at this point we can move in closer to examine the explicit nature of the themes which lie at the heart of *Under The Eildon Tree*.

#### 4

Essentially Goodsir Smith employs a mode of thematic escalation, from 'love' as ostensive theme we are drawn through a complex web, the strands of which comprise the many manifestations spanning the poles from Artemis to Messaline. Ideal to Real, from the sentimental and heavily romantic to the stark and erotically carnal, from the sincere to loaded irony; such co-existences are apparent in every fibre of the poem, from linguistic, stylistic and lexical juxtapositions, 'The Makar macironical' (XXIII. P. 63), to the integration and exploitation of kindred yet diverse personae, each component indicative of the polarities with which the poem is concerned.

If the Artemis/Messaline pivot provides the most prevalent thematic axis there are also several secondary levels of axes which work to balance and counterpoint characteristics of the prevailing dichotomy while dealing with other important if tangential concerns linked to the poem's central movements. By looking more closely at these areas Goodsir Smith's techniques and intentions can be further clarified and the nature of the poem's thematic escalation can be illustrated.

The latent dichotomy epitomised by the Messaline/Artemis axis is apparent from the earliest stages of the poem, in this extract for instance (another epic simile) from elegy two:

For aa their whiteness is as pitch aside your snaw,  
 Their hair but towe aside the raven wing,  
 Their een as flints til your bricht emerants,  
 Their mous as brick aside your lips o gean,  
 Their lyre but hame-spun by your velvous schene,  
 Their hands as but a hind's are til a Queen's,  
 Their thies but sticks aside your floueran dunes,  
 Their breists auld bitches' dugs til your white domes  
 O hinnie-dew –

(U.E.T p. 14)

This hybrid of idealised imaginings with overtly carnal references to breasts and thighs; with the hard, urban connotations of 'brick' and

'flint' set against the soft lusciousness of 'velvous schene' and 'lips o gean', establishes the poem's central tensions. In this way Goodsir Smith circumnavigates the possibilities of sentimentality and idealised exaggeration by emphasising the sheer physicality attendant to his love and loves. The contrast between the grey and impotent implications of 'thies but sticks' and 'Their breists auld bitches'dugs' with the extravagantly lascivious 'floueran dunes' and 'white domes' leaves no doubt as to what is uppermost in the Bard's mind. The Bard's disrespectful, bohemian persona, outlined in elegy five, a bed-full of crumbs, a hung-over head and a fascination with whores, also functions in the same way to counterpoint the more high-flown and sheerly emotional elements – removing such content from the airy-fairy to the flesh, the hybrid creates an unlikely but convincing verisimilitude.

To pursue the escalation, moving forward to elegy twelve, Goodsir Smith uses the Orpheus persona to exemplify and explore such diverse components. Love and lust are shown to be complex, latent and duelling impulses warring in one psyche, as in cartoons, angels and devils have their own word-bubbles drawn from the same mouth – a part of *Under The Eildon Tree* however is designed to show that the walls between the two are illusory.

Conjoined to this central dichotomy there is also the context within which Orpheus can be construed as both killer and victim. That conjunction is examined in further detail outwith the Orpheus elegy providing in itself a secondary thematic axis with its own subsidiary strands lacing the poem.

Elegy ten, which is hinged on the relationship between Burns and Mary Campbell, focuses on the theme of poet/lover as killer. The 'voice' and context relate to Burns, but that this elegy's resonations are designed as integral to the poem as a whole becomes explicit. Like Orpheus in his wake ('Ye ken the tale') 'Burns' says, ' – Its aa i the texts' (X. i. p. 29), and, turning to Burns' 'Highland Mary':

How sweetly bloom'd the gay, green birk,  
How rich the hawthorn's blossom;  
As underneath their fragrant shade,  
I clasp'd her to my bosom!  
(see, 'Highland Mary', in Burns' *Poems and Songs* p.526)

Once more activities under trees indicate a point of transition, a change of state, providing a positive link to the likes of True Thomas,

Mair brichter for its bein tint.  
Distance, ye ken, enchantment . . . et cetera.

(X. i. p. 29)

Such lines display a level of awareness well beyond Orpheus, while interspersed with these twisting emotions there is a further level of carelessness and abandonment which recalls, or anticipates, the Slugabed.

5

As the poet's reflections unfold, bitterness and anger become more and more prevalent leading on to a subsidiary theme comprising a concerted attack on social hypocrisy and presumptuousness; the socio to Slugabed's political, further developing another aspect of the parallel scenario. Like Orpheus among others the Burns persona disparages the validity of objectivity when dealing with love:

-Thus the philosophers!  
My fuit!  
Nyaffs the haill clanjamphrie!  
What ken they o the hert,  
O' bluid, o passion and the gleid  
That blinds een, harms, mense, mynd,  
Ay, and the saul itsel in its reid  
Lowe wi the bleezan brazen seed?

(X. i. pp. 29-30)

These lines disparage his own attempts at rationality as well as those 'philosophers' who would presume to enlighten. However, *this* is no disclaimer, for as the poet rounds on those who cast aspersions on the nature of the love-affair in its aftermath it becomes apparent that, for this persona, the nature of the world, of society in all its vagaries, is clearly recognised and accepted however distasteful and disconcerting:

Nou goave they ower documents,  
Auld screeds thocht tint for aye,  
Nou they 'investigate,' 'collate,'  
- Guidsakes! - *Collate!*  
And pruve me nou that Mary Campbell

('Lingering star!' 'My white rose Mary!')  
 Was nae luve o mines ava,  
 A freat, sirs, o my ower-heatit fancie  
 In a time o tribulation;  
     - Ye ken the leid!  
 And why? And wharfae?

    - Juist acause  
 She was a wee thing flichterie. Thats aa!

(X. ii. p. 30)

Section three of elegy ten continues the barrage, going on to point out that the whole process directed to 'Desecrate' and 'deracinate' the significance of Mary Campbell was carried out in order, 'That the bardic guid-fame may, / In some mesure, be restorit! / And her memorie nocht but a poetic fiction.' (X. iii. p. 30). The anger in these sections rings true and is the more striking in that it relates to 'real' history outwith the mythic context of the Orpheus elegy or the essentially literary framework set up in the Slugabed sections.

In this respect elegy ten has not been land-mined to the extent of elegy twelve and if Burns is shown on one level as 'killer' he also succeeds to an extent in superseding intrinsic character flaws. Like the Slugabed there are nihilistic connotations to the tenth elegy (' . . . aabodie ither will sune be deid', X. iii. p. 31), but this is a part of the persona which enables him to become affirmative – unlike the devastated Orpheus. In the same way he manages to retain sufficient faith in himself, for this elegy can also exemplify a successful exercise in self-persuasion, to maintain that his role as poet and the nature of his love transcends the shallow standards of his society. Acceptance and recognition add up to a capacity for dismissal, so enabling him to take up his life and move on.

Weill, let it be, what maitter  
 Nou gin they disclose  
 The suner or the later,  
     The true, the fause,  
     The former, latter,  
 Cauk or kebbuk or guid cauf's fuit?  
     Theres me kens  
     And Mary kens  
 And aabodie ither will sune be deid –

Sae set the bottle rattlan, John,  
See us a gless thats full,  
Set the bottle rattlan, John,  
And never fash your skull!  
For Mary kens  
And I kens.

(X. iii.pp. 30-31)

As always echoes can be traced, in elegy seventeen in which the Bard deals with *his* sense of guilt ('The faut was mine, I admit,' XVII. p. 51), there are echoes of the last lines of the Burns elegy in, 'Baith kent and kens' (XVII p. 51). In the twentieth elegy, dealing with Tristram, there are volatile resonations of the Burnsian exasperation with convention:

Lord Christ, what's aa the chivalrous laws o courtesie  
Til twa herts reift apert for aye?  
Twa herts as sacrifice til an auld lyart's honour!  
Honour! Vanitie, nae mair.  
The follie, follie o't! Knichtlie troth . . . !  
And this the fell fairin.

(XX. p. 58)

Further, the main problem of the Burns persona is the subjective confusion apparent in the mixture of guilt, pain, carelessness and anger, showing that if ostensibly 'killer', he too becomes a victim in the process, a point implicit in his struggle for continuance. The 'victim' concept is taken up in XI by the Bard and correlates to, as well as further elaborating, the nature of the subtle variants in the conditions of the likes of Slugabed, Orpheus and Burns.

Elegy eleven develops directly from ten, here, set against the persecutor / killer angle preceding, Goodsir Smith portrays the poet/lover as the sufferer, the tortured victim – drawn from the responsibility to Self and to morality by the overpowering nature of all-encompassing love. The elegy opens by picking up on the jibes at 'philosophers' in the tenth elegy:

Tell me, philosopher, hou can he tell  
Whas hert was made owre big,  
By God creatit wi a hert  
Owre bruckle til the derts  
O' yon wee loun wi wings and bow,

Blind loun that warks sic tragedie,  
 Hou can he tell whats wrang, whats richt,  
 And whilk the airt  
 Is his by richt  
     And whilk by micht  
 O' the borneheid and eisenan hert?

(XI. p. 32)

Goodsir Smith recognises that such an abdication is at once inexcusable and unavoidable, so condemning the lover, 'Guilty, m'lud!' (XI. p. 32). There is no defence, particularly since the victim recognises and acknowledges the nature of the malaise yet remains incapable, unwilling, to take evasive action. Consequently the lover is condemned and committed to the appropriate fate in a parody of death in the Roman arena:

The portes gant. Their chafts outbock . . .  
 Lions? Wolves? It maitters nocht.  
     – Rive him apert!  
     – Hurroo!  
     – Yippee!  
 The mob rairs like a sea.

(XI. p. 32)

The context is primed to render this portrayal as ludicrous yet still symbolically potent. The beasts, the lions and wolves, are allegorical significations of the sensual passions and the subjective damage shown as common to Burns, Orpheus, Slugabed, by extension the rest of the cast, finds its echo in physical mutilation.

The victim's heart is removed 'For demonstration purposes' and for the lover's 'ain torment'. In effect a communal heart with which we are already familiar, displaying scars associated with one member or another of the assembled cast. The 'divine white surgeon'(XI. p. 33) who removes the bloated organ is equally familiar:

My maistress wi the satin smile,  
 My dumb and dizzy blonde,

(XI. p. 33)

– so spelling out the perpetrator and emphasising the subjective implications of the mutilations inflicted.



Whichever 'character' is centre stage, Goodsir Smith takes care to show that each role is in some degree interchangeable, the lover, whether male or female is both killer and victim in one shell (and Burns too was notable in attempting to encompass both viewpoints). Back to the inescapable paradox and leading on to a further thematic pivot which embodies and exemplifies the poem's many diverse strands.

6

One of the most important of the elegies in *Under The Eildon Tree* is the ninth, for it provides in one image an encapsulation of the essences the poem as a whole is designed to explore. The image is that of 'The twa-backit beast'. One of love's intrinsic levels of paradox is its derivation, usually, from the alliance of two disparates – man and woman. In sexual intercourse the paradox of physical difference is at once embodied yet resolved in the coupling, ironically that resolution being dependent on the difference. Here the lovers are 'Thegither as we were but ane' (IX. p. 28), but the basic image is developed and imbued with a significance transcending the overtly physical reaching out to encompass the subjective and the cosmic, further aspects of the poem's mutable core of polarities.

Elegy nine opens on a clear statement of the solipsistic or selfish propensities of the lover:

Hou can we hae pitie, mercie, here  
 Liggan our lane on the gerss  
 And Cynthia smilan abune  
 Mercuric and sillerie  
 I' the lythe simmer nicht,  
 Hae pitie, ruth, for the misfortunate  
 That trachle, bleed and dee  
 On the warld's reid battlefronts,  
 Or the weak and seik,  
 The faimished,  
 And thae that wauk  
 By the beds o ailan weans  
 And deean kin?

(IX. p. 27)

The idea of lover as solipsist should be a contradiction in terms but by correlation to the microcosm and macrocosm Goodsir Smith shows that it need not be. It is that solipsism which draws the world in around the two lovers ('aa the world is this wee gair' IX. p. 27), so that they may be shown as microcosmic in significance, for the world's perplexities are symbolised in the paradox of their union and difference, '... mair is twafauld nor the beast,' (IX. p. 28), the macrocosm is triggered and spans out in ever wider cycles:

The Beautie that the Beast maun bed  
 Is twafauld here, the Fairheid  
     O' our luve, and twafauld tae  
     Is aa that ee can see;  
 The yerth is us, the lift, the mune,  
 Aa couplit in our couplin here,  
 And there is nocht but our twa sels,  
 Our passion's gleid, our herts, our sauls,  
 Ablow, aben, ayont, abune-

(IX. p. 28)

Elegy nine concludes with the lines, '-As sayis the auntient Catechist: / 'Luve is the great Solipsist'.' (IX. p. 28). Therein lies the central paradox, the obsessive solipsistic propensities of love can, as we have seen, condemn or destroy the recipient, yet the all-encompassing and potentially revelatory nature of such obsessiveness and its potential as a transcendent force or, as above, through a fully consummated union, are among the main reasons for love's superiority as a theme of poetry. The incorporation of the 'auntient Catechist' in itself a pointer to the timeless potential of the theme, supplementing the various manifestations of timelessness running throughout the poem.

*Under The Eildon Tree* is as much about aesthetics as it is about love and that point conjoined to the potentially transcendent or destructive components of solipsism lead into some of the stranger zones of the poem and mark a further level of thematic escalation.

## 7

A number of Sydney Goodsir Smith's critics have commented on the darker sides of his work and certainly elements of pessimistic disillusion and helplessness can seem to pervade *Under The Eildon Tree* and do

require further comment. We have seen how Tir-nan-Og is set against various scenarios of desolation, each in their way dangerous hinterlands, yet just as Tir-nan-Og is manifest in many forms so too the element of desolation is present in forms more elaborate than those of the barren/subjective landscapes discussed earlier.

The world *Under The Eildon Tree* is concerned with (and it is ours) is godless:

The gods hae laid their plans throu a billion aeons  
 O' the menseless birlan universe  
 At length to venge their enmitie on man  
 (That put them on their seats to comfort him,  
 Tochered them we pouer unprincipled  
 And syne forgot them utterlie.)

(II. vi. p. 16)

So far as the poem is concerned we *can* forget them – and all the gods, demi-gods and mythological characters in the poem do nothing to change that, they are ciphers for our own intrinsic natures. Elegy twelve, concerning Orpheus, shows that he is patently absurd in his black (and melodramatic) depression, yet correlation to the succeeding elegy suggests that his *real* condition, in direct human terms is even bleaker. His subjective damage is real and if his suffering is not of the nature he himself believes it to be this in turn is only further illustration of the extent of the damage. Bearing that in mind the closing words of the elegy, 'Aa this will happen aa again, / Monie and monie a time again,' (XII. iv.p. 37), assume a different if even bleaker significance than beneath the veneer of the mythological context; correlating more ominously to the historical context of the poem.

While humour, irony, self-mockery and satire, seem to defuse the bleaker elements in the poem (though the humour itself can be black enough) the process is further inverted through the ongoing process of recontextualisation. While Goodsir Smith enables the reader to assimilate his complex and eclectic vocabulary on a serious level through the use of those early ironic components, so too, by a reciprocal process, the use of irony in the long run leaves the darker areas standing with an equal seriousness capable of undermining the humour and irony in turn.

Such a process means that an underlying veracity should not be discounted with regard to many of the more pessimistic phases of *Under*

*The Eildon Tree*. Thus the nihilistic orientation of elegy nineteen, 'At the moment ae nicht hence / Is juist my limit o belief in Providence.' (XIX. iii. p. 56), as well as the despair of Tristram in elegy twenty:

Then, there was howp, and gifna howp then life at least..

Nou, the howp is smaa and anerlie death at back o it;

(U.E.T p. 57)

– must be assimilated as integral and on a serious level with the lighter, optimistic or more profound aspects of the poem.

There is no compromise, as Slugabed has it, 'Theres nae hauf gaits in luv, ye ken,' (VII. p. 25), and if in Tristram's 'The follie, follie o't,' (XX. p. 58) can be heard Conrad's 'The Horror! The Horror!' it is because it *is* there and must be. This is as it should be in a poem wherein the central concern is the multiplex of paradox inherent to man in every aspect of his being. Epiphany is laced with sorrow, love and joy with death and despair, laughter with silence, youth with age and loss, self mockery and irony with deep-rooted fear – each exerting their opposing forces, a terse and tense dichotomy.

## 8

In the present context 'silence' is a significant factor with an uneasy role of its own in the poem, correlating thematically to Thomas' silence while in Elfland. Yet references to silence, and to somnolence, are so prevalent that they over-step that context. In the first elegy the narrator, introducing his 'final testament', states that this will be the final work before 'His music turns to sleep, and / The endmaist ultimate white silence faas / Frae whilk for bards is nae retour.' (U.E.T p. 13). In an obliterating image akin to the snow there is:

Aa the haars that hap the yerth

In jizzen aince again,

Swirlan owre the warld

O' the centuries' great poesie,

Can smore the names of aa,

Aa memories –

(U.E.T p. 13)

Again in the fourth elegy another anticipation of ending in silence appears as, ' . . . the sleepless, waukless, dawless nicht,' (U.E.T p. 18). Orpheus too, having craved sensory detachment in the wake of Euridice's loss, ironically finds his art silenced in the aftermath:

Sinsyne I haena plucked a note  
Nor made a word o a sang,  
The clarsach, and the lyre, the lute,  
    'The aitan reed',  
Byde untuned in a yerdit kist.  
My taiblets aa are broke, my pens brunt,

(XII. iv.p. 37)

As a final example, and there are many more, moving forward to the twenty-second elegy, the Bard expresses his fear that, 'the silence may come swith on me / And the wild leid nae mair tak wing.' (XXII. ii.p. 61). (This shared fear providing yet another link in the chain, paralleling scenarios).

Such references to fear of being silenced, of lethargy, of somnolence, are so prevalent that they begin to nag as real fears outwith the aesthetic distance Goodsir Smith is usually careful to maintain. This is a concern which lurks in most writers' minds and if it shines through we should not be too surprised – and certainly in that respect, as a subjective component of the poet's make-up, whether of Goodsir Smith himself or his diverse personae, it does have its place in *Under The Eildon Tree*. If we consider MacDiarmid's relative silence after the deluge of work in the thirties, or the fate of another contemporary, Dylan Thomas, the cause for concern can be seen as close and real enough for Goodsir Smith and here again there is that pre-empting of the post-modern, a lament for the Makar's powerlessness in the post-war world, that death of poetic power in many respects to be enacted by Samuel Beckett in his movement from massive novels to smaller and smaller plays and at last to choreography and the eschewal of language.

Stepping back from the poem, the bleaker elements do seem particularly striking, perhaps as in the case of MacDiarmid with *To Circumjack Cencrastus* the harder a writer works for objectivity the more those elements too close to home tend to emerge in the weave. Retaining an objective stance with regard to subjective material is a precarious business.

Silence however is also of significance in the essentially aesthetic

context, and of creativity generally, one of the poem's functions being to formulate an answer to the question posed in the sixth elegy:

What wey suld I, my hert's luve,  
 Scrieve ye mair?  
 Hae ye no had a thrave o sangs  
 Frae me ere nou?  
 – And ye wad answer:  
 Why indeed?  
 Hae ye no had a haill beuk-fu  
 O' sangs frae me?  
 What need is there  
 For screevin mair?  
 – And ye wad answer:  
 What indeed?

(U.E.T p. 22)

Given that one, often ironic, area of *Under The Eildon Tree* is intended to demonstrate that love does indeed provide the poet's ultimate and only worthy subject matter, it is also concerned with the nature of writing, and continuing to write, as a subject in itself.

The spiritual havens constantly alluded to can correlate as another extreme option on a par with Messaline and death and carnality, and Artemis as ideal, all-encompassing love. A poet must deal with such extremes but cannot afford to stay with them if he is to function as a writer. Like Thomas in the grip of the Queen of Elfland, the point of extremity necessitates – dictates – silence. Artemis, Messaline, are all ultimately synonymous with silence, with aesthetic extinction.

In Goodsir Smith's scheme of things the poet must always inhabit the lands in between, stay on the road and accept no haven yet always find a place with a clear view. 'The middle-airt, the Gowden Mean, / Has little recommandan hit,' (VI. iii.p. 23), like a bullfighter the poet needs to be close enough in for the danger to be very real, to be cut just enough to decipher (and re-cipher) the experience (and to state *that* blandly would have struck Goodsir Smith as pretentious in the extreme – one further angle on his choice of devious routes).

The essence of this, and the core of the poem itself, comes in elegy nineteen, tying up diverse strands of psychological symbolism, interior/subjective imagery and analogy:

I mock, I mock, and speak o daith  
But aye you ken, my tyger luve,  
The hert can dee and nane  
Ken but its murtherer.

(U.E.T p. 56)

By the time we reach the silence in *Under The Eildon Tree* the nature of the dying and of the murderer is much more clear; the most painful, self-murder of the soul inside, and so to the 'death' of Orpheus' power forever.

In the concluding elegy the narrator states, 'I end thus in mockerie,' (XXIV. p. 56) and that mockerie is of both 'luve and daith' (XIX iv p. 56), the only way to maintain a hold on self and reality to aspire to wholeness and so remain as a functional entity.

'Wholeness' is a central concern of *Under The Eildon Tree* and both 'love' and 'poetry' can, when approached constructively, provide modes by which the limitations impeding movement towards wholeness in life can be transcended. With regard to love, one of the implications of the poem is that only a balanced, harmonious union between man and woman can lead to cohesiveness on an individual level (as suggested in IX). Similarly with regard to poetry, only work which attempts to examine and reconcile the extremes symbolised by the inter-relationship of man and woman will constitute a whole and important poetry.

If the loss of the capacity to write is a concern of the poem, of equal importance is the loss of the capacity to love, for that is a way to knowing yourself, which is one of the places that devious route is intended to lead. Both love and poetry can be double-edged:

You and I for wham the centuries hae conspired  
Are melled thegither here like twa elements  
O' air and fire  
Whas happie confluence in some divine laboratorie  
Concocts a new intolerable catalyst  
Whas pouer and potencie  
For sel-destruction, ruin, hell  
Like a bombardment o the saul's uranium,  
Owergangs and stachers aa 'forgaeen computatiouns'

(II. v. p. 16)

That 'intolerable catalyst' like the later reference to 'the precipitate of



our twa luvess commelled / Lowsit a combustion whas Vesuvian spate / Outran itsel,' (XXII. i. p. 61), function as elaborations of 'aye sel-kennin brings hert-thraw,' (X. i. p. 29). The recognition of divergent, warring impulses can be a painful and confusing one even if it can signify subjective progression.

Love can be a powerful force in other respects; in the second elegy Goodsir Smith describes love as the gods', 'anerlie rival on the yerth,' (II. vi. p. 16), and within the context of *Under The Eildon Tree* the gods can be seen as synonymous with man's capacity for self-deceit, remember Orpheus. By ascribing all that seems irreconcilable, impalatable or beyond comprehension to extraneous powers man shrugs off the responsibility to deal with the essences of life and self. However love in its extreme forms confronts the individual with all that seems paradoxical, so forcing a confrontation on one level or another – even a final concession supersedes self-deceit wilful or otherwise. Poetry is shown as a transcendent force in this same context, the Bard writes of his coronach:

I hae a godlike consolatioun  
Left til me; that I hae set  
Wi thir her elegies  
Perdurable the starne o my dark luv,  
My exstasie and torment,  
Hiech i the unsleepan constellatiouns  
O' the North.

(XIX. i. p. 54)

Here, in that 'godlike' the transcendent power of poetry is identified, a further rival for the gods and, like the gods, a good poem has life beyond the mortal span.

With regard to poetry as mode of transcendence, I have already suggested that *Under The Eildon Tree* constitutes the Bard's odyssey, paralleling those of the various personae. In this way the twenty-four elegies can be seen to provide a correlative to the seven year silence Thomas spent in Elfland. A time in which to assimilate extremes, a still-point in time for consideration. At the end of the poem with the Bard's 'Fareweill' to passion (and to the reader), time moves, 'the sand rins i the gless aince mair,' (XXIII. p. 63), as 'Aneth the hills the gigants turn', (XXIII. p. 63), the cogs begin to roll, the endless reality moves on.

9

Like Thomas the Bard can emerge renewed, more fully equipped as a poet, as a person, having dealt with/experienced the extremes inherent both to subjective and objective levels of self and situation. He may sense defeat and lingering doubt, but still he can call for 'Dancing girls' and pronounce, 'O let there be nae gairnin at the bar.' (XXII. p. 63). The Bard concludes, 'Chi ha vessuto per amore / Per amore si mori' (XXII. p. 63), but not quite – the poem may mark a still-point but the still-point is an examination of a cycle – and the still-point is the cycle in synopsis, the cycle does not break. Lives move in them and for all our pain, our recognition of folly, futility and force in often pitiful proportion to the happiness and joy; no sooner do we recognise that than we set off to do it all over again, the poem ends as it began:

Bards hae sung o lesser luves  
Than I o thee  
Oh my great follie and my granderie.

(XXIV. p. 65)

The drinks are set up, the dancing girls await, the Makar prepares for further junketings, 'I turnit back the road I'd come,' (XXIV. p. 64), he knows there is only a 'Tuim' house, 'fremmit and desertit' (XXIV. p. 64), but the road is there and open with promise, 'Theres be ample roses on my road' (XXIV. p. 65), the spirit prevails and regeneration is still on offer.

The emergence is explicit,

Syne the hill opened  
And the licht o the sun beglamert  
The een like the leam o virgin snaw,  
And the derkenin and the dawin  
Were the sevinth year

A lustrum endit.

(XXIV. p. 65)

10

In some respects it is the sheer allusive, structural and stylistic density

of *Under The Eildon Tree* which is impressive: equally so its seemingly effortless envelopment of diverse traditions and cultures, from Scottish and European mediaeval, from Villon to Dunbar, from Celtic and Greek mythology on to the techniques of twentieth century modernism, of Eliot and Pound. More importantly Goodsir Smith moves onto new ground, into the areas of a tentative post-modernism with its intense self-consciousness, its defusion and mockery of artifice and in turn self-consciousness itself – an edgy heightening of that condition *per se*. This essentially post-visionary work sees a marked development from the Goodsir Smith of *The Deevil's Waltz*, yet, for all the bleakness there is still belief here, albeit guarded, that vision *is* attainable. There is too the pervasive imminence of silence lurking in the sub-strata of the entire poem. This is a post-war, post-modern poetry but in a specifically Scottish context it is also post-MacDiarmid (while *he* nonetheless looms as large as Pound or Villon in the weave). There are two points to pursue here.

For twenty years, while MacDiarmid did have real help in Edwin Muir and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, it can be argued that he sustained the Scottish renaissance in his many roles and guises pretty well single-handed up to the outbreak of the Second World War. In the wake of that war though some mode of reassertion was required. MacDiarmid himself had, in real terms, lapsed into a silence of his own, entering a kind of twilight zone it would take another twenty years to dispel. Meanwhile too, the strictures of war had resulted in considerable hostility to the development of Scottish culture for a variety of fairly obvious reasons, from the stirring up of 'British' jingoism through to the association of nationalism with fascism.

So, while we have already identified and taken a look at Goodsir Smith's long term preoccupation with 'the long poem' it can also be argued that *Under The Eildon Tree* is a post-war, post-Drunk Man redefinition and restart of the Scottish renaissance, that much disputed 'second wave'. But redefinition entails an important distinction pertinent to other relevant areas here. World War Two also effectively projected literature into a radically changed context from the one which had managed to remain largely intact up to 1939, essentially that move into a post-visionary age.

In the first half of this century it was still possible for the poet to harbour the self-image of 'man of vision' or even 'seer'. One aspect of this may be exemplified in the aloofness, detachment and intellectual arrogance at times common to Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Lewis. In

this respect too MacDiarmid is a prime candidate, isolated on the Shetland Isle of Whalsay throughout the 30s he seems the epitome, and perhaps the apex, of the visionary traveller in pursuit of wisdom and transcendence. MacDiarmid's lifelong search for the bigger thing, the mandala overstructure which would illuminate and elevate his work is also symptomatic of this conception.

But in some ways World War Two may be seen as completing a process initiated by World War One; it marks a psychological shift, the surfacing of a deeper rooted pessimism and scepticism, as well as realism, a context in which the visionary, the quasi-mystical, the isolation of obsessive aestheticism had nowhere to function, perhaps felt particularly acutely because of the specific vagaries attendant to the Scottish context.

Areas such as these, and the reaction to them, are accentuated throughout *Under The Eildon Tree*; there is the constant defusion of artifice, the inversions of conventional poetic and classical myth, the demolition of the poet's ego, the intense self-reflexive patterning. If the silence concluding MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* is implicitly transcendent; the lurking silence which haunts *Under The Eildon Tree* is death: the opaque silence of ending, the extinction of poetic power and an acceptance of a limited and shackled vision, albeit with sights set firmly on stripping down experience to the real.

It is here that the central significance of the poem lies; in Scottish terms there is a degree of mirroring in the work of Sorley MacLean, less tangibly in the work of both Norman MacCaig and W. S. Graham and, more recently, in the work of Edwin Morgan and Iain Crichton Smith and on to what may seem retrospectively a logical conclusion in the diverse output of Alasdair Gray. But in the 40s this radical shift is felt particularly forcefully in *Under The Eildon Tree*, for in many ways it can be argued that the poem pre-figures much that will feature in the works of, say, Auden, of Vonnegut, Grass and Nabokov (it is suggestive too that 1948 also marks the composition of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*, but *that* is a different study for another day). The poem represents a consciousness which in many ways may be seen as prevailing to the present day, although it may be that we are already entering a post-post-modern age which we have yet to find a name for.

But there is a paradox here; for though the poem may prefigure a general post-war tendency, and its capacities are in some respects both deeply pessimistic and negative, there is the balance of that 'reassertion' suggested above. For *Under The Eildon Tree* also functions as a rallying point in its embrace of the Scottish tradition embodied in its diverse

strata. In many ways the poem steps apart and beyond *The Waste Land* and *A Drunk Man*. Like the latter it is a gathering of forces yet in its structural harmony, its cyclic possibilities as well as its distinctive breaking of new ground it also constitutes a reaction against the modernism embraced by Eliot and MacDiarmid while ironically employing many of the devices initiated by that movement to significantly different ends: again a signpost on the way to the post-modern.

As a final point and a last edge to the paradox, it has been suggested that *Under The Eildon Tree* is at once the apex and the end of the Scottish renaissance. This is only reasonable if we limit our concept of the renaissance to work in Scots, certainly the poem has no logical successor in Scots, while Goodsir Smith's own work in the wake of the *Eildon Tree* deviates, as we will see in succeeding chapters, in four different directions virtually simultaneously (short poems, drama, fiction and different kinds of long poem).

There is though no logical reason to limit notions of the renaissance to work in Scots and it can be argued that the most logical successor to *Under The Eildon Tree* is Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* and that Goodsir Smith's poem is the central and crucial point in the panorama reaching from the *Drunk Man* to *Lanark* and it is in terms of the transitional point on that suggested spectrum that the significance of *Under The Eildon Tree* will ultimately be seen to lie. We occupy an age of the breakdown of genre, partly a factor I would cite in justification of the incorporation of *Lanark* in this scenario, and this too is strangely apparent in the diversification which takes place in Goodsir Smith's work as we move on to look at some of the other works completed or initiated in this period.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TILL THE MUNE GREITS BLUID <sup>1</sup>

#### 1

For Goodsir Smith, from the late 40s throughout the 1950s add up to over a decade of mixed blessings; on the negative side his first marriage was in bad shape, the late 40s were one of the most unhappy periods of his life, exacerbated by a disastrous love-affair which left its pall over the new decade. Ironically, if typically, it was in the aftermath of that affair that he produced *Under The Eildon Tree*, part response, part exorcism perhaps, but most importantly, the full flowering of his inclinations towards a composition on the grand scale to fulfil his architectonic bent.

This too was not without barbs, for *Under The Eildon Tree* to some extent was a culmination; if *The Deevil's Waltz* is acknowledged as the apex of his first phase of development, a movement into a more mature poetry, then *Under The Eildon Tree* in itself constitutes the culmination of a second phase after which he seems to have found it difficult to redirect and focus his energies and aspirations, for all that, his output was nonetheless substantial. The situation though was not improved by his domestic circumstances and certainly not by his health. The asthma which plagued him was particularly bad in the early 50s and for nearly a year he was in and out of hospital on a regular basis. Not auspicious working conditions.

However in 1951 he met Hazel Williamson, soon to become his 'mistress' and later, or eventually, his wife in 1967.<sup>2</sup> From 1951 Hazel features as a 'character' in the poetry just as Goodsir Smith himself strolls in and out of the work in one guise or another.

Goodsir Smith's work in the decade following *Under The Eildon Tree* became much more diverse. In 1951 he published *A Short Introduction To Scottish Literature*, originally conceived as the introduction to a series of talks on Scottish literature for radio: a project which never reached fruition. In 1954 he brought out a (slightly) revised edition of *Under The Eildon Tree* and branched out into editorial work. This heralded the appearance of *Robert Fergusson 1750 – 1774* ('Essays by various hands to commemorate the bicentenary of his birth') in 1952, followed by editions of both Burns and Gavin Douglas in 1959. Goodsir Smith



also edited the magazine *Lines Review* for five issues, no.7 to the double issue 11/12 between 1955 and 1956.

In terms of production and publication of creative work the 1950s constitute his most prolific decade. In the early 1950s he was working on *Colickie Meg* (currently unpublished),<sup>3</sup> a play loosely derived from his novel *Carotid Cornucopius*, as well as his first works in longer forms written for broadcast. The earliest of these was *Orpheus and Euridice* an expansion of 'Elegy XII' from *Under The Eildon Tree*. Although this was only published in revised form in 1955 the piece was broadcast on 29th March 1949. Also conceived for broadcast was *Gowdspink in Reekie* which, again, although only published in book form in 1974 made its first appearance as 'Gowdsmith in Reekie' in the pages of *Saltire Review* 2 (5) in 1955 with date of composition cited as 1954.

In the midst of all this there were also two substantial collections of poetry: *So Late Into The Night* (1952) which contains shorter poems dating from 1944 to 1948, and *Figs And Thistles* (1959) which, similarly, is a collection of diverse pieces from various dates throughout the 1950s. Lastly in this regard there were also three short collections of poems, *The Aipple and the Hazel* (1951), *Cokkils* (1953) and *Omens* (1955). As this is clearly an eclectic body of work, in order to establish a clear perspective, the primary focus in this chapter will be on the poetry in shorter forms before moving on, in Chapter Six, to look at works outwith the parameters of poetry *per se*. Chapter Seven will deal in some detail with the work collected in *Figs And Thistles*, a major collection often regarded as ranking with the *Eildon Tree* as amongst the finest work. In the concluding Chapter Eight I will consider some of Goodsir Smith's late and last works in longer forms before moving into an assessment of Goodsir Smith's overall achievement and significance.

## 2

Chronologically then the next step is to the work collected in *So Late Into The Night* which parallels the composition of *Under The Eildon Tree*. This work, along with the three shorter collections, while not so clearly stepping into the uncharted areas of quasi-postmodernism, is important in different respects. Mainly in that these books mark the fruition in the distillation and lucid realisation of many earlier inclinations, namely the response to the push of modernism itself; with, meanwhile, a good deal of the *Eildon Tree*'s experimental edges



finding further expression in Goodsir Smith's work outwith poetry *per se*.

*So Late Into The Night*, from 1952, was published by Peter Russell in London and features a selection of short, sometimes very short, lyrics; witness 'The Mandrake Hert':

Ye saw't floueran in my breist  
 – My mandrake hert –  
 And, wi a wild wae look,  
 (O my dear luve!)  
 Ye reift it scriechan out . . .  
 And the bluid rins aye frae the torn ruit.

(S.L. p. 26)

This is one of a number of short poems singled out for attention in a short preface to the book from Edith Sitwell, others include 'Saagin', 'Defeat o the Hert' and 'Ye Spier Me'. Goodsir Smith was a great admirer of Sitwell's *Facade* and she in turn was supportive of Goodsir Smith's work.<sup>4</sup> Sitwell's preface while highly complimentary tends to be rather impressionistic in critical terms but she does draw an interesting comparison between Goodsir Smith's work and that of Emily Dickinson:

With almost all great poetry, the greatness is as much a matter of diction, of verbal magnificence, of a fire or flowering of words, as of the spirit. Sometimes that greatness is the result of a genius for 'transparency' – to use an expression of Mr Eliot's. (This 'transparency' is one of Mr Goodsir Smith's qualities). It can be found in the midst of a strange darkness, or in an equally strange lucidity. But rarely – very rarely – is it independent of diction. It is so however, in a few poets, in the best poems of Wordsworth, for instance, or in the best of Emily Dickinson.

(S.L. p. 7)

Many of the short poems in this collection suggest qualities in common with Dickinson; the pervasiveness of dichotomy and paradox, the sparse use of language and structure, the fascination with epiphany, a capacity to juggle with cosmic perspectives and a fondness for anthropomorphism all signalling connections. From a more oblique perspective, Thomas H. Jackson in his introduction to *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*

(London 1970) remarks on Thomas Wentworth Higginson's embarrassment at his 'inability to classify' the poems that Dickinson sent to him.<sup>5</sup> In this respect too there is a kinship with Goodsir Smith, Sitwell herself, in the lines cited above, seems to be having the same problem, just as, so often, work of the kind collected here is identified as exemplifying 'the lyrical cry', which is not very helpful.

As these remarks may suggest, Goodsir Smith's work can sometimes seem equally difficult to 'classify'. The work collected in *So Late Into The Night* is essentially homogenous in terms of structure, theme, technique and language, notably too in the paring down, verging on eradication, of punctuation and a radical distillation of form. Looking at these poems in the wake of *Under The Eildon Tree* it can seem as though Goodsir Smith has pared down his *ideas* as well. The points cited here though only indicate the surface veneer of this work but they also offer a number of inroads into the poetry which can clear a path toward a more succinct perspective on Goodsir Smith's objectives here, as well as the directions in which he is being drawn.

Given that the poems in this collection were all written between 1944 and 1948, the period covering the composition of *Under The Eildon Tree*, it is tempting to see many of the poems gathered in *So Late Into The Night* as splinters or flashes given off from the broader work. The poem 'Luve's Despotism' is a case in point, with the title alone recalling pilot themes central to *Under The Eildon Tree*; here the schism between intellect and emotion, love and reason are dominant, with the tensions initiated in the opening lines:

Gyves on the hert-strings,  
Chains in the bluid,  
I'd lea ye, luve,  
Gin I'd find the road.

(S.L. p. 38)

The language is carefully controlled here and fuses with subject matter; the opening line in particular with its suggestion of tautness in the sharp vowels, the cutting 'y' of 'gyves', complements the psychological inner-tensions dealt with. The deep-rooted nature of the schism too is implicit in the second line with its quasi-genetic implications serving to compress a great deal into two short lines, similarly, lines three and four with their weary shrug of resignation and the economical flicker of Goodsir Smith's familiar subjective symbolism serve to compound

a tautly wrapped package. This is a distinctive feature in many of the poems here, direct expression of complex themes in a minimum of space, virtually a carefully crafted short-hand, a compression illustrated in the fourth stanza of 'Luve's Despotism':

The wecht o your gyve-airns  
Mense canna raise  
Gin the blind bairn  
Demands his fees.

(S.L. p. 38)

This encapsulation, while echoing surface themes from *Under The Eildon Tree*, also functions as a sharp *contrast* to that poem's devious aesthetic strategies. The effects suggest that Goodsir Smith channelled all of his inclinations towards linguistic overkill and stylistic excess, his manipulation of rhetoric, into the context of his long poem, leaving work in *So Late Into The Night* as an amalgam of skeletal forms literally blunt in their approach. Stripped of the technical density which can weigh down some of his earlier work in shorter poems, the basic lyric forms in this collection reveal a fresh and succinct imagistic clarity complemented by the compression illustrated in 'Luve's Despotism'.

Although the work here is stripped down to the bare bones there are still pervasive echoes in miniature which recall the pyrotechnics of *Under The Eildon Tree*. In the poem 'The Royal Drouth' for instance can be discerned a characteristic and almost luscious use of simile:

The black was mirker nor the nicht,  
The reid than bluid was reid,  
The white was whiter as the licht  
The mune on cranroch spreid.

Whiter nor milk the white o your lire,  
Hair jet as the black swan's doun,  
Your rose-reid kiss mair lowpan fire  
Nor the bleezan sternes abune.

(S.L. p. 48)

In *Under The Eildon Tree* such simile could span substantial passages while the poem's over-all context would significantly influence its implications, here though the images are allowed to work for themselves,

unadulterated. The central movement revolves around the clustering or accumulation of images relentlessly rising and finding focus in the concluding stanza:

The deep south yesternicht was mine,  
I plucked the rose o Spain-  
Och, neer has rin mair richer wine  
Nor yon I preed yestreen.

(S.L. p. 48)

This is at once sensual, serious and light-hearted with rhyme and rhythm tightly controlled without losing the sense of natural flow essential to the lyric form. Edwin Muir once noted that it is the hardest thing in the world for the awkward human race to be natural and it is one of the more surprising aspects of these poems that their subject matter so often tends to hinge around the qualities and stresses in the individual which are among those very factors making us so awkward. Such areas are dealt with quite explicitly in 'Sonnet: Mansel':

I am that I am, alane and ane,  
Yet pairt o the haill flume o man;  
I am a strauchle never dune  
O' vile and guid, pride and shame,  
Hate and luve – like til a wean  
Is bits o aa his sib and kin.

(S.L. p. 60)

Such collation of the subjective anomalies inherent to our natures surfaces again and again in the poems here and, indeed, are prevalent concerns in much of Goodsir Smith's work; at the same time such areas also recall much that is central to Scottish literature, from Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* on to MacDiarmid's adoption of the Caledonian Antisygy:

-Yon Janus Godheid, Lord-and-Deil,  
That I made in the likeness o mysel.

('Sonnet: Mansel', S.L. p. 60)

Examples such as these illustrate a central distinction between the two books, where in *Under The Eildon Tree* such material is

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expansively illustrated through elaborate contrast and intriguingly accentuated through the manipulation of personae and self-parody, in work like 'Sonnet; Mansel' the case is much more directly stated while illustrations are compact in the extreme, even the hyphenation at 'Lord-and-Deil' functions mimetically in accentuating the schism at the core of the poem.

Such elements of correlation and contrast aside however there are a number of other poems which stand out in this substantial collection and warrant closer attention in that they prefigure some of the refinements and developments we will find expanded as we move on to look at Goodsir Smith's subsequent work in shorter forms. A poem of particular interest is 'Luve's Thirldom' which characterises a number of this book's outstanding features, nevertheless with its roots in familiar Goodsir Smith territory, love and attendant paradox:

Luve whiles is but a peerie daith,  
The granderie wi hemlock thrawn

(S.L. p. 32)

Goodsir Smith moves on to focus on the 'hemlock' idea and employs it as the basis of extended analogy:

Like ivy's luve that kills the tree  
Wi fell green airms that straik  
Wi saftest burnan lemanrie  
Till tichter and mair monstrous grown  
The mirk leaves' fouthie kiss smoores aa  
And kills wi its croun o monarchie.

(S.L. p. 32)

The paradoxical components are pursued, while the striking nature of the analogy stands out, almost akin to metaphysical conceit in complexity. This stanza also features an equally complex rhyme-scheme, oblique and assonal. These almost sub-aural 'rhymes' are loosely constructed with little formal pattern although the lines are precise in syllabic balance. The assonance can be picked up in the line endings, 'daith/straik', 'thrawn/grown', in 'tree/lemanrie/monarchie'. Such structural and textural intricacies formally complement the intricacies of the poem's central theme which becomes more gradually apparent as we move on through the second stanza and as the conceit unfolds:

I am the tree and you the green  
 Luved poison that is wreistan me;  
 I wad cast aff thae circlan airms  
 Saft round my craig – but aye ken weill  
 I'se joy them till the mune greits bluid,  
 Till fishes stalk about the yerth,  
 Until sweet aipple trees rise up  
 Frae the skuggie gairdens o the sea,  
 Till owre the lift an ape-like paw  
 Scribes in fire the final sign  
 And FINIS fleers on the endmaist page o Time.

(S.L. p. 32)

The crux of the poem is the equation, love gained=self lost, the loss of free will and stifling images of subjugation emphasise and exemplify the loss of control attendant to the condition. This is vivified by the potentially haywire surrealism of the natural world where 'fishes stalk about the yerth' and 'sweet aipple-trees rise up / Frae the skuggie gairdens o the sea', all elements which firmly prefigure work to see fruition in the likes of *Cokkils* and *The Aipple and the Hazel*. The potentially destructive nature of such involvements laid bare in the poem above, while recognised, is inexplicably inescapable, the relentless inexorable grinding of the force of paradox pervades. This is particularly so in the last three lines, the hand of Darwin is echoed in that 'ape-like paw', a realm without divinities only the inevitable evolutionary unfolding, creating an intangibly imminent sense of threat and foreboding.<sup>6</sup>

Poems such as 'Luve's Thirldom' draw attention to undercurrents running throughout *So Late Into The Night* in various related veins, as for instance in the suspense and suspension in 'Saagin' or the subtle inner-tensions of 'Leander Stormbound', structural balances which, once more, gell tellingly with subject matter. 'Saagin' is a metaphysical poem and also reminds of early MacDiarmid, relationships apparent in the movement in the first stanza from speculation on subjective, psychological perspectives:

A demon bydes in the breist in dern,  
 In the unkent airt  
 That's neither saul nor mynd nor hert;

(S.L. p. 12)

to the cosmic perspectives of stanza three:

Like the globe swings throu equinox  
And for a moment spins  
Atween twa suns,  
Nou in saagin my weird rocks.

(S.L. p. 12)

Here the unpredictability and sometimes precariously unfathomable nature of our psychological make up is set beside the Earth balanced, equally uneasily, on the centre of a cosmic see-saw. The latter image picks up and develops a perception of the subjective potential for a sway from good to evil and all that may lie between. A vivid evocation of fine and strange inner-balances, made particularly striking in its settings, fluctuating from microcosmic to macrocosmic in the move from stanza to stanza. As we have seen this is a familiar approach in Goodsir Smith's work but by this stage in his development appearing in increasingly dexterous and refined form.

Such structural tactics find their echo in other areas of the poem and can be traced in the, once more, assonant rhyming which mimics the tenuousness of subject matter (in that the rhymes themselves are tenuous rather than firmly accentuated). Similarly the idea of suspension between polarities is highlighted in the disjunction of syntax by the stanzaic movement, as in the transition from one to two:

And, whiles, like a bairn

Warslan to be born,

(S.L. p. 12)

The imagery is staggered here, lending suspense, while the central image of imminent childbirth comes with attendant uncertainty of outcome, simultaneously providing a backdrop of anatomical interiorism paralleling subjective and cosmic perspectives alike.

'Leander Stormbound' too features interesting tactics which stand out in this collection. The poem opens on deceptively casual anthropomorphism:

The auld mune on her back  
In a black lift o rags



That the wind pell-mell  
 Ryves wi a banshee yell  
 And a blaff o hail . . .

(S.L. p. 23)

The second stanza moves to a haikuesque concentration of imagery, in itself unusual in Goodsir Smith's work:

Out throu her eldritch rags  
 The auld mune-hag  
 Looks on the bylan seas  
 Whar sleek as backs o seals  
 Curls ilka sweel,

(S.L. p. 23)

The quasi-whimsical if potentially earthy anthropomorphism (the first stanza suggests the moon as an old whore, legs spread but in decay, battered by a hard world, keen but not fit for work), in conjunction with the concrete imagery of 'the backs o seals' in stanza two, provides a stark contrast successfully fused. The perspectives here manage to be at once tangential and tactile.

Such peculiar co-existences are apparent on different levels in this poem, the 'Leander' of the title, for instance, is mentioned *only* in the title, not in the poem itself, a minimalist use of rhetoric, the 'Leander' myth providing a coherent and poignant infrastructure supplying supplementary emotional impact attendant to concrete imagery and to the ostensive scenario of forlorn lover:<sup>7</sup>

And awa ayont the faem  
 And the black storm, at hame  
 Ye're sleepan peacefullie-  
 Or maybe hear the thunderan sea  
 Wantan me.

(S.L. p. 23)

Arguably sentimental, but the power and lucidity of the imagery carries the poem. In addition the paratactic utilisation of the 'thunderan sea', a perception shared, in itself offering a mode of contact for the physically separated lovers, provides yet another level further emphasising the central disjunction of perspective.

The effect can be dynamic as the reader's perception and interpretation are manipulated from level to level, building up a multi-faceted complex with each layer inextricably inter-related. The complexity of the fusions of syntax and ideas, the intricate layering and integration of devious devices in poems like these, prefigure once more work such as 'Cokkils' and some of the work in *Omens*, pointing the way to a full focus on more elaborate techniques. And, it is in the three short collections of poems published between 1951 and 1955 following on the heels of *So Late Into The Night* that we find many of the new directions and refinements discussed above coming to full fruition.

### 3

These short collections, each made up of nine poems, derive from an intricately mythologised, romanticised personal scenario often leant further complexity in that in many cases they are founded on concrete biographical backgrounds.

These were very personal books (clinically 'pamphlets'), designed for and/or dedicated to Hazel; they are essentially about that relationship and, although personal in the extreme and in some aspects private, they supersede any degree of insularity precluding their efficacy as poetry.<sup>8</sup> In certain respects the very privacy and allusiveness of this work function as oblique modes of communication, basically by incorporating the universally identifiable traits of lovers, the shared secrets and intimacies; the very existence of such a codified universe, with which each of these three books can be synonymous, is a factor to which most can relate, even if they do not know the code.

The first of these shorter collections *The Aipple and the Hazel* contains only eight poems (although Hazel Goodsir Smith's personal copy has one more added at the end ('Witch of all Delyte' which has never been published), and is Goodsir Smith's most overtly autobiographical book, as well as his first, creative as opposed to critical, publication of the 1950s.

*The Aipple and the Hazel* was published by the Caledonian Press, dated 'Hogmanay 1951' while the frontispiece carried the dedication 'To the onlie begetter H. W. ' (ie Hazel Williamson), the pages of this edition are not numbered. Only four of these poems, 'The Aipple and the Hazel' itself, 'The Mune May', 'Go to Bed Sweet Muse' and 'Made when Boskie' were included in Goodsir Smith's *Collected Poems*.

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During composition of these poems Goodsir Smith was heavily immersed in *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, which was published in 1948. In a letter dated 17 January 1947 to Derek Savage, Graves briefly outlines his objectives in that book:

In *The White Goddess* I am attempting the more difficult critical task: it is a sort of historic grammar of poetic myth, explaining how the unicorn got its tail, why God created grass and trees before he created the heavenly bodies, what coffin King Arthur was buried in, what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, where is Wisdom to be found? etc etc.

(*Between Moon and Moon: Selected Letters of Robert Graves: 1946–1972*, p. 39)

As could be guessed from the preceding commentary on *Under The Eildon Tree* such material was gold-dust to Goodsir Smith, and as is so often the case, his reading matter was assimilated in the poetry as a matter of course. Graves writes of the apple and hazel at length in *The White Goddess*, allocating the symbolic qualities utilised in the poem 'The Aipple and the Hazel' and, thereafter, throughout the sequence.

That Goodsir Smith's new lover was named Hazel seemed an auspicious omen, suggesting collocations he could not resist employing, as in these opening stanzas from the opening poem which establishes tone and context for the succeeding poems:

She was a witch  
Her mysteries nine  
I' the hailie wuid  
Whar the muses reign  
And the aipple and hazel are as ane.

In the youth o the world  
When Deirdre walked  
Bards had a calendar o treen,  
Their number and divinitie ilkane  
The aipple and the hazel were the ninth o them.

Secret number o the Muse  
Under the white mune,  
Hazel was for sang and luve,

The aipple immortalitie  
And daith for onie skaithit them.

(*The Aipple and the Hazel*)

These assignations of mythical values are drawn directly from Graves' 'researches', notably the pervasive, mystical nine and, with regard to the last lines quoted above, the fact that at one time in Britain damage to either apple or hazel tree did carry the death penalty.<sup>9</sup> This obscure and exotic material was shared by the two, its very obscurity and exclusiveness, not to mention its dubious academic standing, proving ideal constituents for the construction of the private, personalised infrastructure of *The Aipple and the Hazel* functioning as bonding factors, shibboleths almost, passwords to the secret universe.<sup>10</sup>

In any close relationship shared knowledge and familiarity with esoteric or *outré* ideas and objects are symptomatic and can become symbolic of the deeper unities shared. These become more apparent as Goodsir Smith delves more deeply into some of Graves' ideas, enabling him to supersede the private mythologies and significances in which the sequence of poems is framed and to deal with broader concerns deriving from the new relationship while focusing on the essential dichotomies of existence, so vividly evoked in the *Eildon Tree*, as well as a number of more directly aesthetic concerns.

In *Between Moon and Moon* the editor Paul O'Prey comments on the basic ideas behind Graves' concept of the White Goddess. O'Prey summarises the book and it is worth looking at his remarks here since the ideas are particularly pertinent to diverse aspects of *The Aipple and the Hazel*:

In 1950 the first of Graves's four 'Muses' entered his life. His central argument in *The White Goddess* is the persistent survival of faith in the Muse among 'what are loosely called 'Romantic' poets who derive their imagery, either consciously or unconsciously, from the cult of the White Goddess'; he suggests that the 'magic' their poems exert depends on their closeness to describing the Goddess or her presence. Now that the ancient Goddess religion has long been dead, however, 'She' has become a personal rather than a national or public deity and to experience the Muse fully Graves came to believe that the dedicated poet, one who writes private as opposed to public poems, must fall in love with a 'Muse-possessed' woman and suffer at her hands as the ancient myth is acted out,

the White Goddess myth which he claims is the archetype of which all true love poems are either fragments or variations.

(*Between Moon and Moon*, p. 82)

That Goodsir Smith is writing 'private' poetry on one level here is clear and that Hazel is conceived as a 'muse-possessed' woman is implicitly stated in the opening poem, 'The Goddess lay in the Hazel's shrine' ('The Aipple and the Hazel'), basically she represents new energy and impetus, while the ideas of Graves provide a ready made context for new ideas and experience.

The Graves-derived superstructure works on a parallel with autobiographical components and with the familiar vagrant, bohemian personae adopted, the overall construct constituting a highly romanticised mythological, disguised autobiographical miasma. In 'Song' for instance the lines, 'The aipple was a puir bard / And the hazel his luv', conjoin the myth, the guise and the reality, the romantic setting too is integral on all levels, 'And aye the white mune ridin / High above' ('Song').

One aspect of this sequence may serve to emphasise the complex nature of the various interdependent levels employed here. Throughout the poems, images, symbols and allusions relating to shelter, haven and sanctuary are in evidence. In 'The Aipple and the Hazel' itself we find that idea of warmth and shelter in the lines 'My luv and I / In a wee room lain', however such tangibly physical images are encompassed in the mythical scenario, still emphasising the notion of haven:

Outby, the Queen  
 Outrade the storm  
 And the black rain  
 Drummed abune

(*'The Aipple and the Hazel'*)

The 'real' world of hostile elements symbolising the hurly-burly of the outside are melled with mythical symbols in an intricate weave, an intricacy belied by the simplicity of language and form. For the two new lovers in the real world of Edinburgh in the early 1950s such havens were important, for while the images presented of outlaw lovers, bohemian carousers rampaging the streets and pubs, 'Rowth and fowth wi surfet tuim'd the gless' ('Made when Boskie'), are highlighted and emphasised to fictionalise, the realities of their situation were often not so radically different.

This is apparent with regard to lines such as these from 'The Mune May' which epitomise aspects of the sanctuary theme:

In a dernit nest  
Like a hallow tree  
In a garrety house  
On a stey stey brae  
There we convene  
Whar nane can see  
But the white mune  
My witch and me.

('The Mune May')

The romanticism in these lines is inescapable, the Bard in his garret with his witchy lover in a setting presided over only by the moon. But these lines are also an accurate description of the studio of an artist friend of the two who gave them the run of the place and arranged to be discreetly absent.<sup>11</sup>

Although such biographical correlatives are essentially extra-textual they give some indication of how closely Goodsir Smith's life and work were interwoven, particularly at this time. In addition these images of shelter and apartness fuse with Graves' concept of the incarnation of the Goddess in whose company the poet is inspired and elevated. In the poem 'Said Heraclitus' the proximity of his lover precipitates the poet's perspective from physical to cosmic and back:

Silent, they gaze in ither's face  
– Aa time sleeps in her een,  
Eternitie sabs in ae embrace  
And, as it breathes, is gane.

('Said Heraclitus')

Together, poet and muse incarnate are at the centre, the hub:

My little witch, ye ken my leid,  
Deep in this tideless dwaum;  
See there the white mune rides abune –  
At tempest-mid is calm.

('There Is A Tide')

In such scenarios reality spins around in co-operative, perceivable forms, here, as in much of Graves, the images are of mystic centrality, realities unravelled, unlike Graves, the more serious aspects or the mystical components are tempered with humour, as in the example below where the cosmos is enlisted as fellow conspirator in what is essentially an adulterous liaison:

The little sternies, e'en, in their degrees  
 Conspired to gie us time and space  
 Langour and laurel'd ease  
 For aa wir luve and lemanrie-  
 All, aa, bewicht as me  
 By ae mune-maiden's face

(*'Made When Boskie'*)

It is from this 'bewicht' state that the poet's multi-faceted vision derives, encompassing the divine, cosmic, mythical, physical, emotional, carnal, the matrix of reality with the plethora of dichotomies personified by 'luve' providing the key to the matrix. Necessarily the elation inherent is paralleled by the awareness of 'the greit i' the hert o things' ('Said Heraclitus'), integral to the nature of our lives as it is to the poem sequence itself.

Reality's sting in the tail, the flip-side to every coin, is broached initially in 'Time Be Brief', the third poem in the sequence. This is a tentative step towards deeper paradox, here the obverse of lovers' union is laid bare in an expression of the poet's anguish during the absence of his muse incarnate:

Time, be brief  
 My fair luve far  
 Time, be brief  
 Our twynin's sair  
 This wearie week  
 I wad be whar  
 Titania sleeps  
 Amang her hair.

Time, be brief  
 My witch is far



Lang thir nichts  
And langer mair  
The wearie days

(‘Time Be Brief’)

In this state the bard is haunted and tormented, far from the state of cosmic grace and vision, yet that torment is an intrinsic part of the hyper-awareness concomitant to the poet’s vision:

Her face aawhar  
Her voice speaks  
In all I hear.

(‘Time Be Brief’)

Hazel Goodsir Smith has described some of these poems as ‘little light songs’<sup>12</sup> and, in this case, that is basically true. Nonetheless poems such as this with its radically refined language, its rhythmic precision and control coupled with an oddly natural (given the myth context) expressive directness, illustrate Goodsir Smith’s development and constant distillation of material. This is a long way from the sometimes claustrophobic density of *Skail Wind* or *The Wanderer*.

The ‘greit i the hert o things’ is dealt with most explicitly and expansively in ‘Said Heraclitus’, a counterpoint to images and symbols of union, peace and sanctuary wherein the temporary if inevitable separations can taint the pleasure of the present with their presence in consciousness. Simultaneously they are redolent of ‘little death’ symbolisms, reminding that such separations are kernel manifestations or pre-echoes of the grand scale terminations containing our lives, vestigial remembrances of parameters. In ‘Said Heraclitus’ such diverse levels are accounted and escalations identified:

Said Heraclitus ‘Fire and flux,  
Naething but does muve,  
Aathing a flouerin and a deein.’  
– And sae wi luv.

(‘Said Heraclitus’)

These are the perpetual dichotomies, ‘flouerin and a deein’, which permeate every aspect of being and which colour the lovers’ perceptions. ‘Sae, luvrs deep in glamorie / Are kin’a waefu, whiles, wi joy.’ (‘Said

Heraclitus'), such recognitions are positive if solemn and resigned:

But as we twine, juist as we twyne,  
 Anither tryst draws near  
 And ilka day apairt  
 But hastes me to my hert.

(*'Said Heraclitus'*)

Goodsir Smith recognises in these poems an ultimately tragic nature in things, but that goes hand in hand with the balancing recognition that at least within allotted cycles joy and despair, love and loneliness, alternate as surely as day and night, as the seasons turn, all that can be done is to taste hard on the places that please.

Similar ideas are explored in the poems 'Go To Bed Sweet Muse' and 'There Is A Tide', in the first 'the smile is bitter-sweet' and the 'hert is fou wi greit', here though sanctuary and peace supersede:

She sings and syne the lowe-licht dees  
 And silent in my airms she's lain  
 We hae anither sang to sing  
 – 'The aipple and hazel are as ane.'

(*'Go To Bed Sweet Muse'*)

The ambiguity in these lines, the collocation of peacefulness with the suggestion of fertility and fusion in the central image set in turn beside the fading of 'the lowe-licht', the light of poetic vision and potential transcendence, emphasise a parallel with the broader context of life and death projected from the love and loneliness base.

Similarly in 'There Is A Tide' there is an echo of Heraclitus in 'There is a tide in luv's affairs' and the uncertainty is integral:

Nou in this saagin-tide we swey  
 And the world wags and empires faa-

(*'There Is A Tide'*)

In this poem while basic insecurities are acknowledged, peace and contentment if temporary, are allowed to reign:

My little witch, ye ken my leid,  
 Deep in this tideless dwaum;

See there the white mune rides abune –  
At tempest-mid is calm.

(‘There Is A Tide’)

This is the love that takes you out of time, the vagaries of the cycle, embodied here as the tempest. While ‘the greit i the hert o things’ is literally and inescapably at the heart of the poem-sequence that very recognition enables Goodsir Smith to manipulate the material, to shift the balances making the overall effect an expression of positive assertive statement. One which would not function without acknowledgement of darker realities; cherries without stones to Goodsir Smith are not viable, that need not spoil the taste.

Images of endless union, ‘The story has nae endin / For their luve had nae end’ (‘Song’) and of cyclic movements, ‘But to retour, she says / But to retour again’ (‘Said Heraclitus’), permeate the poem and supersede the bleaker components. The last poem in the (published) sequence ‘Made When Boskie’ is a celebration and regeneration which encompasses all of the diverse elements making up the sequence as a whole. The vagrant bohemian personae, the street life of ‘Rivers o whisky’ and ‘credit credit aawhar for the drinkin’ (‘Made When Boskie’) are conjoined to the carnal, the mythical and quasi-mystical ‘our Divine debocherie was sweet’ (‘Made When Boskie’). Such polarities run throughout, functioning as a generating force, perpetuating the poems, mirroring movements of years and lives, for the sequence is itself cyclic and regenerative. The refrain ‘And the aipple and the hazel are as ane’ runs throughout, an image of bonding which acts as a bonding force in itself through its pervasiveness, effectively the beginning and ending are synonymous.

The co-existence enumerated in ‘Made When Boskie’ are at once key and apex, turning the cycle around on itself in a fusion much akin to the more elaborate manifestations of *Under The Eildon Tree*, but here there are fewer traces of the shrouded pessimism that underlie that poem. *The Aipple and the Hazel* if tempered by ‘the greit i the hert o things’ is above all a celebration of love and inspiration, of poetry itself.

#### 4

The second of the three shorter collections, *Cokkils*, was hand-set by Callum MacDonald and was published in December 1953 in a limited edition of 220 copies, as with *The Aipple and the Hazel* pages are not

numbered. This collection is less sequentially unified compared to its predecessor, but there is a thematic coherence to *Cokkils* in that most of these poems deal in one way or another with a sense of deep fulfillment after a long, unhappy struggle.

This is most apparent in the poem 'Journey's End' which amounts to a concise postscript to *Under The Eildon Tree*. The stylistic and technical similarities between the two are so immediately evident as to give rise to suspicion that 'Journey's End' began its life as an out-take from the longer poem.

The collocation is signalled firstly by the opening allusions to Aphrodite, omnipresent in *Under The Eildon Tree*, but that this is a postscript, not an out-take, is apparent in the negative phrasing, a non-invocation in fact:

Never, thocht I, again sall I seek out  
The kingrik, fell domain  
O' Aphrodite's perilous regalitie

('Journey's End')

The terms of reference employed with regard to Aphrodite as 'The Threepauld Goddess', 'the Slayer' and as 'Unmercifu Destroyer' also strike up vivid echoes and retrospective pointers to *Under The Eildon Tree*. There are other distinctive indications that this is a postscript, the use of query for instance:

Hou could I, luve's feckless vagabone  
Victim o sae monie wae campaigns  
Win hame nou til this seilfu hyne?

('Journey's End')

This too is a stylistic characteristic of *Under The Eildon Tree*, as is the guise of 'feckless vagabone', a persona reinforced by the conscious echo of Burns, another 'character', in 'Leeze me nocht on luve' (see, 'The Holy Fair').

As in the poems from *So Late Into The Night*, 'Journey's End' differs from its longer predecessor, radically so, in that while virtually every statement in *Under The Eildon Tree* is undercut, mocked or twisted, here the statements are allowed to stand as positive assertions of contentment and happiness, this *bard* has his 'seilfu hyne'. The last stanza is unequivocal if once more wreathed in myth:

8/57

Efter lang seekin, efter sae lang  
 In weirdless wud Walpurgisnacht  
 Coast hame, tie up, in leefu harborie  
 Whar my witch smiles onwytan me –  
 Een o the Pythoness, deep as a bairn's  
 Amang Titania's mune-kisst croun o hair.

(‘Journey’s End’)

The memory of the witch persona here too from *The Aipple and the Hazel* functions as a related mode of retrospective reference, picking up and tying off those pervasive biographical stitches as well as hinting toward a kinship, in its self-reflexiveness, with the suggested postmodern currents of *Under The Eildon Tree*.

Some of the other poems in *Cokkils* fundamentally echo these sentiments, this sense of fulfilment, as in ‘Her Dominion’ or ‘The Quenchless Gleid’, but they can also be markedly different in kind. Of the nine poems here six are set in very short forms illustrating further distillation of technique; the use of language is curt and almost violently oblique while punctuation is terminated. The poem ‘The Reid Reid Rose’ illustrates such qualities:

It is wi luve  
 The thick bluid dreeps  
 It is wi luve  
 The een owrehing wi sleep  
 It is my hert there skaitht  
 Wi hers, and deep  
 The twafauld spate  
 Thegither grows  
 Bluid-choked i the teeman hert  
 O’ the wearie burnan rose.

(‘The Reid Reid Rose’)

The distinctive compression of these lines is further accentuated by the gory vocabulary ‘thick bluid dreeps’, ‘my hert there skaitht’, or, ‘Bluid-choked i the teeman hert’. The poem’s compression owes much to Goodsir Smith’s by now familiar technique of elaborating subjective conditions or events in terms of the objective and anatomical. Similarly the short staccato lines reinforce an impression of brutalisation, both in terms of form and subject matter; the lines themselves are virtually

without punctuation, there is only one comma and a stop at the end, rhythm and line lengths alone are left to indicate modulations.

This severe economy with punctuation is usually effective in the shorter poems, but its use in a longer poem 'The Ineffable Dou' leads to confusion and lack of control.<sup>13</sup> In this poem of fourteen stanzas there are only five commas and one full-stop, the effect here is to allow the material to slide:

White Dou o Truth  
Black Dou o Luve  
Perpend, incline  
My sang to pruve

What ye be  
Hert canna tell  
Nor mynd nor saul  
That in ye mell

What life I hae's  
Hauf mine hauf thine  
You speak throu me  
But hauf is mine

(*'The Ineffable Dou'*)

Images, ideas and statements are thrown together in a deluge, the impression is minimalist, but here Goodsir Smith's usually precise ear fails him and rhythm and line modulations break apart in a lax, linguistic overspill. Repeated readings begin to impose form, but many conjunctions remain uncertain and ultimately unsatisfactory. 'The Ineffable Dou' though is an exception and the other poems here are convincing in their skeletal forms.

This collection constitutes something of a pivotal point in Goodsir Smith's development, from the (relative) clutter of *Skail Wind* through the impressive, expansive complexity of *Under The Eildon Tree* to *Cokkils* where he has pared down his work to the bone, a brutal minimalism from which only a renewed expansiveness offers direction (to emerge more fully in *Figs and Thistles*).

'Cokkils' meanwhile, stands out head and shoulders over its companion poems and exists in two versions, the shorter version, appropriately here, and in a significantly longer form in *Figs and Thistles*, a context

more appropriate (as we shall see) to its more syntactically complex structure. Both versions were written on the same day on one sheet of A4 (dated Jan 52), Goodsir Smith left the choice of which to use in *Cokkils* up to Hazel, she chose the shorter version. 'Cokkils' suggests a distinctive precedent may lie in MacDiarmid's poem 'On The Ocean Floor'. In his essay 'Makar Macironical' (*Akros* Vol 11 No 31 August 1976), Kenneth Buthlay has noted the similarities, to the detriment of Goodsir Smith's poem. Certainly there is no doubt that there are immediately striking similarities:

. . . as one who hears their tiny shells incessantly raining  
On the ocean floor as the foraminifera die.

(MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, p. 535)

Slawlie throu millenia  
Biggan on the ocean bed  
Their ain subaqueous Himalaya  
Wi a fine white rain o shells  
Faa'an continuallie  
Wi nae devall.

(Goodsir Smith, *Collected Poems*, p. 135)

It is unnecessary to dig too deeply to note that the two poems, whatever the genesis of the latter, are radically different. Structurally and linguistically they are poles apart although a certain syntactic similarity can be detected as a correlative of the analogy's complexity, but the main difference is that while MacDiarmid's poem is a meditation on the evolution and elusive nature of art and intelligence, 'Cokkils' is above all a love poem, something MacDiarmid really only managed in unguarded moments. Specifically Goodsir Smith's poem is a reflection on the subjective growth and almost intangible if gargantuan essences of that complex condition, love.

As love poems go 'Cokkils' is one of Goodsir Smith's finest. Vocabulary, imagery, syntax and rhythms are finely modulated to complement the various levels and movements of the poem as well as mirroring the emotional state dealt with.

In this opening stanza the gentle assonance of 'Doun' and 'throu', 'sea' and 'continuallie', supplement the delicacy inherent to the brittle consonants of 'cokkils' and 'continuallie'. From the reflective, fragile opening, establishing the poem's meditative mood, there is a movement into turbulence, a concomitant in the language to the emotional turbulence



from which the movement of the poem derives. The pervasive 's' sound in 'ceaseless' catches the 'shush' of the sea, emphasised by contrast with the more blunt, restless connotations of 'on-ding', an item of vocabulary in itself raising unmistakable echoes of MacDiarmid:

Doun throu the sea  
 Continuallie  
 A rain o coddles, shells  
 Rains doun  
 Frae the ceaseless on-ding  
 O' the reefs abune  
 Continuallie.

('Coddles')

The second stanza sees a further shift to capture the relentless and cumulative growth of the emotional complex. The almost sub-aural assonance is continued, but it is the usage of 'millenia', 'ocean' and 'Himalaya' in swift succession which is effective here in suggesting the inexorable and immense nature of the subjective forces at work. In the same way, the use of 'subaqueous' provides a neat and appropriate correlative to subjective content while sustaining the sense of magnitude. In symbolic terms this is life underwater. Modulations continue to vary with a movement back to the delicacy and gentle, almost snowy, images of the opening lines, so maintaining the meditative, reflective mood:

Sae, in my heid as birdsang  
 Faas throu simmer treen  
 Is the thocht o my luve  
 Like the continual rain  
 O' coddles throu the middle seas  
 Wi nae devall-  
 The thocht of my true-luve  
 Continuallie.

('Coddles')

The culminating third stanza again carries the assonance in 'heid', 'treen', 'faas', 'gang', 'simmer', 'bird' while here the harsher vowel sounds create a conclusive tone further accentuated in the melodic coupling of 'middle seas' with the final 'continuallie', a patterning it feels the poem has been building up to from the start. Here too the doubling up of

analogy with the incursion of 'as birdsang', to extend the basic analogy is mimetic in effect, catching the growth, complexity and pervasiveness of subject matter. That is only fully revealed in this last stanza as the diverse build-up of images, ideas and moods conjoin in the final revelation, creating a quality of epiphany as the poem's substance and 'meaning' emerge. The final downbeat statement emphasising the massiveness and complexity involved in the word 'love'.

'Cokkils' displays a remarkable degree of compression and diversity of moods, levels and settings for such a short poem. This is indicative of the direction Goodsir Smith's work is to take, leading away from the minimal and oblique into work utilising many techniques familiar from *Under The Eildon Tree* but revitalised and transmuted to shorter lyric forms, gradually paving the way for rather different long poems, a process which begins here and is continued in *Omens*, the third of the shorter collections of the 1950s.

## 5

*Omens*, like *Cokkils*, was printed by Callum MacDonald and appeared in December 1955 in a limited edition of three hundred copies.<sup>14</sup> Of these short books *Omens* is the strangest, a strangeness intimated in the title itself, 'omen'; prognostication or signification, but here with no specification, we pick up the signals but have no key, the impression intended, the sensations and circumstances of the poem's narrator.

Two poems in particular illustrate this aspect, 'Mareeld' and 'Omens' itself. These poems have an epiphanous quality akin to that of 'Cokkils' and again recall some of the early MacDiarmid and that underlying eeriness common to so much Scottish poetry.

'Omens' consists of three short stanzas, opening on ostensibly objective perception:

The lane hills and the mune  
(Nichtertale in Yarrow  
Under the Gray Mear's Tail)

('Omens' p. 12)

The objectivity is undercut by portentous implications, the 'Gray Mear's Tail' for instance relates to long, streaky cirrus cloud, traditionally a portent of rain. This paves the way for a catalogue of omens as sub-strata underlying the objective:

-By me the white coronach  
 O' rairan linn  
 Skriddan and cataract  
 White i the wan  
 Licht o the sickle mune.

Throu the blae gulph  
 O' mune and mirk  
 Athort my vision suddenlie  
 A lane white bird  
 – The screich o the linn  
 At my back, and abune  
 The far and numenous mune –  
 Silent, the bird, and was gane.

('Omens' p. 12)

A set of conflicting implications are set up here, the pervasive use of white, representing qualities (of which the 'rairan linn' partakes) such as simplicity, innocence, truth and hope, complemented by the 'white bird' symbolising the conscience or soul of man. Yet the bird's connotations, the silence and the bird's passing, are ambiguous, potentially ominous and suggesting transience. That ambiguity is picked up by other components, the 'white coronach' with its resonations of the dirge or lament being potentially funereal; melled with white this provides a pivotal conjunction. The poem's staggered syntax too contributes to the portentous edge of 'something' going on, or about to, with dislocated images forced into conjunctions belying grammatical construction.

The illuminations on this scenario, 'the wan / Licht o the sickle mune.' ('Omens' p. 12) are tenacious and like to fail, 'the blae gulph / O' mune and mirk' ('Omens' p. 12), a half-lit uncertainty of a world exacerbated by the latent insistence in 'The screich o the linn / At my back, and abune' ('Omens' p. 12), significantly now from somewhere behind. Like the feelings of uncertainty the poem provokes, the linn is not fully perceived, but its presence is inescapable if unformed.

The last stanza of the poem compounds the mysterious aura:

O, my hert, and I kent nocht  
 The gods' intent  
 Nor kent their omens'

Truth or this  
 -But what gin I had then  
 The kennin I hae nou?  
 -Maybe's as weill our een  
 See little, and far less  
 Can understand.

('Omens' p. 12)

The poem's narrator has come to know what such conjunctions foretold. This is implicit in the use of tense, 'I kent nocht' or 'What gin I had then / The kennin I hae nou', firmly placing the opening stanzas in a retrospective context. We are told neither what befell the narrator nor what the 'kennin' consists of. Implicitly, nothing good, the poem's only *direct* statement is that foreknowledge could make facing the future intolerable. The conclusion may seem a bit trite, but the poem as a whole has a redeeming haunting quality and the ending emphasises the stranger, resonances preceding.

If 'Omens' emerges as a dark poem, 'Mareeld' which functions in a related manner offers a perspective of light and optimism; in poem to poem here there is the same balancing of conflicting or ambiguous connotations to be found as inner-tensions in 'Omens' itself. 'Mareeld' deals with portents in a much more direct form than 'Omens', centering on the account of a night of shared marvels akin to the sharing of obscure knowledge discussed with regard to *The Aipple and the Hazel*. In that case the shared marvels were esoteric, in this case objective, but with concurrent portents of good fortune, not untarnished with doubt.

The poem's opening is light-hearted and recalls the Bard of *Under The Eildon Tree*, who but he would get away with lines like these:

I hae kent magic, ferlies, glamorie  
 (Pour poete c'est son métier)  
 I've kent the freits and fancies  
 Spaedoms, auguries and ominous ongauns  
 O' the dernit demimonde, and tae  
 I've kent the nichts the days unnatural  
 When aa the elemental world  
 Was in a lowe o rackless divinactioun  
 Potestas and gurgous majestie -

('Mareeld' p. 16)

This is overkill, but with delight, retaining dignity, the delight lies in the wilful manipulation of alliteration, exotic vocabulary, oblique macaronics while the (linguistic) dignity is there in a convincingly aureate style and tone, fused surprisingly with ruggedness exemplified particularly in those last two lines. The stanza almost in spite of itself sets a majestic scene which lends dynamism to the sections which follow, the short second stanza continues to build up to the spectacle comprising stanza three:

D'ye mynd we trailed our fingers owre the side  
 And saw the mareeld i the waters o Carron?  
 A sang gaed owre the cauld and lither swaw-  
 There was juist the lichtliest peeriest braith  
 O' a deean wind i the sail-  
 Deep nicht, and a ring o human lights  
 Far aff on the human shore-  
 She by my side and the mareeld white  
 Elvish bewitched munesiller flake on flake  
 Flichterie-fleeterie fleean in our wake ...

(*'Mareeld'* p. 16)

'Mareeld' is defined as 'phosphorescence', specifically '...emission of light without combustion or perceptible heat' (O. E. D. ), so here as with the omens of 'Omens' we are amid phenomena without correlative or readily perceptible source or meaning. In this poem the meaning lies in the sharing of the experience and, in concordance, the emotional complex which attaches is appropriately 'light' both in a joyous and a quasi-mystical sense – epiphany is the order of the day:

We sat and trailed oor fingers i the ferlie  
 Leuch i the nicht was there for aye  
 Invoked the mune our patroness and queen  
 Blessed her and leuch again  
 For very blythness and the luv we had.

– It was the end o simmer and wad never end  
 Yon nicht we saw the mareeld  
 I' the secret waters o Carron.

(*'Mareeld'* p. 16)

The line 'wad never end' is a taunt, for the Mareeld is transient and its correlation to the emotional complex incurs an ambiguous undercurrent that lies beneath the poem's celebratory tone. As throughout *Omens* you cannot trust the surface layer, or the layer beneath, co-existences are a central part of the point.

There are different if related strategies happening in this collection, outwith the omen orientated work; there are several poems, notably 'Hert, Tell' and 'Black Hours' which are interior monologues addressed to the 'hert'. These, conjoined to shorter poems enacting a satellite function, serve to draw out a number of underlying directions and themes of an appropriately (as regards internal, anatomical and subjective probings) subterranean nature, which are of significance in supplementing the basic omen theme.

Darker regions are suggested in 'Omens' with its twilit scenario and the acute sense of aural perception attendant to the rush and fall of water, suggesting caves, echoes and too much sound. In 'Mareeld' the mysterious sub-marine activity suggests a subterranean parallel which is further hinted at in 'the secret waters o Carron' ('Mareeld' p. 16). All of these diverse images and omens are pointers into a diverse life of the mind, the scene of most of 'the action' in this book.

This is distinctive in 'Black Hours' with its eerie nocturnal landscape:

Luve, this is wearie thinkin –  
Here at the dimmest howdumbdeid  
Whan wraiths walk owre  
The deep  
And undigg'd infant lairs  
O' undefylit luve.

('Black Hours' p. 8)

The opening line points to the interiorised context of the landscape which follows. These scenes seem weirder still bearing in mind that this is an address to the heart, address to part of the anatomy, an internal organ, a bizarre if logical adjunct to the interior monologue, talking to yourself in entirely literal terms:

Hert, lea me nocht in targats  
Bits and raggit ends –  
Gang your roads ere  
Yon, pack

Up and gang, hert,  
 Never be  
 An idle tributarie  
 To a fell  
 Desire.

Gang your weys ere yon!  
 Ere yon  
 Be on the laich road doun  
 And neer turn back –  
 Or back  
 Retour sans hert, sans aa  
 But mine ain black  
 And sleepless  
 Bell-hung  
 Hell.

(‘Black Hours’ p. 8)

These are strangely pulsing landscapes, from subjective to objective to the physically internal. There is a strong edge of violence here too, suggesting physical disintegration and mutilation as well as psychological, a familiar technique in Goodsir Smith’s work but, here again, used to fresh effect, you can never be sure of these landscapes and netherworlds, they will not stay still.

The undercurrent of violence is further drawn out in ‘Queen Murderess’ where Eros is portrayed as a bloated sucker of blood, a leech-like image:

Queen murderess  
 This cruel luve we hae  
 Grows muckler wi its bluid let  
 Eros by murder waxes fat.

(‘Queen Murderess’ p. 10)

Again this is psychological damage and Goodsir Smith is direct in expressing its origins, coming down to the paradox:

Can luve in sicna straits  
 Eer ken what’s curst, what’s blest?

(‘Queen Murderess’ p. 10)



The element of violence pervades the poems, in 'The Tarantula of Love' carnivorous connotations build on the leech image preceding:

Here the tarantula is king  
Mated wi despair and fed on hopes

(*'The Tarantula of Luve'* p. 13)

The subterranean context too is emphasised here in the opening stanza with 'Luve' in 'its ain labyrinth', the threat is inherent with 'The minotaur's rank braith upon us' (*'The Tarantula of Luve'* p. 13). These images accumulate accentuating such elements of threat and precariousness each in their way deriving from that 'greit i the hert o things', the repeated incorporation of interior images a concomitant of probing to the heart of the matter, as in the poem 'Hert, Tell', in typically, necessarily paradoxical fashion. Here the heart is addressed once more and questioned:

What is the pain  
I' the hert o luve  
Itsel?  
Is't but the common dreid  
O' Man's time-sunk mortalitie?  
That aa our splendor pruve  
But mortal, fleet-  
As gerss, and that?

(*'Hert, Tell'* p. 14)

– but found wanting as 'owre semple platitude' (*'Hert, Tell'* p. 14). Goodsir Smith sets that fear of the transitory against another layer and source of disquiet, that the 'dementit pain' may derive from force of sufficient magnitude to supersede mortal bounds:

Our luve is writ  
Timeless upo the face  
O' time, and we in it

(*'Hert, Tell'* p. 14)

The suspicion is double-edged, at once a source of joy and celebration, but tempered with the knowledge that pain is built in, suggesting unease at such duration. The barbs cannot be extracted, responses are always

torn in this way, hence the diverse modes of rending and the labyrinthine questings.

In the end, the romantic notions of 'Hert, Tell' are acknowledged and, in the closing poem, transience is recognised as the way of things, which, as with nights which need not be wasted on mundane matters like sleep, is no reason not to make the best of things:

But here we've aa our life to loe  
     Aa our life leelang  
     – We'se sleep hereafter, loe me nou  
     And aa my life leelang  
                     Leelang –  
 Aa my life leelang.

('Aa My Life' p. 17)

The designed, eerie tentativeness of *Omens* brings to mind Donald Davie's remark on some of Ezra Pound's work in his essay 'Poet as Sculptor' where he writes of a poetry which initiates and echoes 'a state of mind in which ideas as it were tremble on the edge of expression'.<sup>15</sup> The poems in *Omens* are things and about things you cannot quite put your finger on, though they often leave you with a deep sense of uneasiness. A strange book invoking intimations of dark and light, and concomitant manifestations of each. Although the book ends on an optimistic note, the effect is, as in *The Aipple and the Hazel*, to establish a complex network of balance and counterbalance where no factor fully assumes dominance. Here that is achieved in a much more opaque, or at any rate tentative, manner. As the title implies, we are left more than usual to form our own conclusions as to what is going on here.<sup>16</sup>

Up to this point I have looked fairly exclusively at the poetry of Sydney Goodsir Smith, simply because that is where *he* began, the point from which he developed, similarly, first and foremost he remained 'a poet' all of his days and that is primarily how he will be remembered. Nonetheless, some of his achievements in other areas, fiction and drama, are important and parallel much of the work discussed here in terms of period of composition. Chapter Six of this study then will focus on works ranging from Goodsir Smith's experimental novel *Carotid Cornucoptus* through to his work as a dramatist, notably *The Wallace*, first published and performed in 1960 and featuring more recently in the 1985 Edinburgh Festival marking an overdue, if temporary, renewal of interest in Goodsir Smith's work.

## CHAPTER SIX

### HIGH-JINKSES WI LOW-MINXES <sup>1</sup>

#### 1

If the collections of shorter poems discussed in the preceding chapter constitute something of an apparent development if not deviation when set in the wake of the expansive regions of *Under The Eildon Tree*, there were nonetheless a further series of experimental works underway in the same period, the late 40s and throughout the 1950s. While this period saw the appearance of some intrinsically different kinds of long poem as well as a series of much more densely textured shorter poems (see Chapter Seven) there were also a number of extra-poetic ventures which have on the whole tended to be ignored or dismissed by critics of Goodsir Smith's work. Various factors have contributed to this neglect, on the one hand Goodsir Smith's novel *Carotid Cornucopius* and the play, *Colickie Meg*, are both linguistically opaque and remain elusive of critical definition, while later, more conventional works, such as *The Wallace*, have widely been seen as flawed and lacking in substance.<sup>2</sup>

While this last point can in some limited respects be substantiated these remarks also indicate a central point of divergence between these works. Namely that they were conceived with essentially different aesthetic objectives in mind. *Carotid Cornucopius* is quite overtly an experimental novel, conceived and executed as 'a text' with *Colickie Meg* an equally challenging adaptation designed for stage or broadcast. *The Wallace* on the other hand, while not devoid of experimental significance, was conceived much more directly with reaching a more conventional theatre-going audience.<sup>3</sup>

So, for Goodsir Smith, the 1950s begin to emerge as much akin to MacDiarmid's 1930s: both writers almost literally boiling over in their respective decades. Each too, in the midst of serious health problems and domestic upheaval. Given MacDiarmid's stay in Perth's Murray Royal Hospital that 'almost' above should probably be deleted. Nevertheless, Goodsir Smith in his own quieter way pursued as many often seemingly bizarre tangents, extending the parameters of an eclectic body of work. Of the central works under discussion here I will begin by taking a closer look at the two more wildly experimental ventures before moving on to

consider more briefly the merits as well as some of the weaknesses of *The Wallace*.

## 2

*Carotid Cornucopius* and *Colickie Meg* are at once the most intimidating and the most contentious of Goodsir Smith's works outwith poetry, so much so that aside from fragmented extracts (see note <sup>3</sup> Chapter Five) the latter remains unpublished. While the first may be loosely termed 'a novel' and the latter 'a play' they are also the embodiment of a wild, aberrant and unique poetry, wilful jibes at genre – a factor, among many others, which correlates many aspects of this work to the quasi-postmodern elements of *Under The Eildon Tree*.

They can though be related to Goodsir Smith's work as a whole in other ways, essentially in that they provide further divergent modes or frameworks facilitating the constructive contextualisation of Goodsir Smith's diverse inclinations. In this case towards linguistic overkill, esoteric, allusive or excretory humour, conscious and complex experimentation, structural and temporal convolution. In addition, he overturns most of the laws of biology, 'invents' a language for himself which, if ostensibly prose with a strong Scottish flavour, is also riddled with alliterative and assonanantal effects intercut with rhymes, songs, parenthetical digressions and false trails of all kinds.

There is also the suggestion of a good deal of relish in the high spirits of the book and in its liberal usage of a four lettered vocabulary which those 'polite souls' (of The Saltire Society) would find highly unpalatable:<sup>4</sup>

– the Caird, with sexdream sotisfunction, reefulled his meg with a buttool of Borecundy, flanging the toom husk til the flair with a titrumpheonic, reburburating expuncheon or expansioun of belly-breeze, gulchexcracktatioun or bolch, that vimbruted baith the winnocks and wedows of ilka house for crackstane miles aroun and fair skittered tae smashareens all gloss wundin the inmentionabull viceinateat and nubber or rabblehood.

(C.C. pp. 64-65)

This offers a preliminary flavour of 'Carotidian' prose, illustrating the totally different kind of region we are entering. The central point here

though is that the diverse areas of Goodsir Smith's work can be viewed as mutually interdependent. In this case with *Carotid Cornucopius*, with its wild indulgence, haywire scenario, its pervasive bowel oriented humour, as in the lines above, serving as an outlet channel securing the complex control of *Under The Eildon Tree*, which, in turn, makes possible the sparse and skeletal lyric forms discussed in Chapter Five, and, of course, vice-versa. In many ways each work effectively provides a filter process enabling Goodsir Smith to achieve a cohesiveness and uniqueness in his work across a wide spectrum of activities. Among the problems attendant to Goodsir Smith's early work is the collision of these divergent directions and objectives.

Appropriately perhaps, the publishing background to *Carotid Cornucopius* is almost as elusive as its contents. The book exists in two forms, the first was published privately (for the Auk Society <sup>5</sup>) in 1947 by the Caledonian Press in Glasgow as *Carotid Cornucopius: caird o the Cannon Gait and voyeur o the Outluik Touer* (and much more, see <sup>6</sup>), the cover announced 'The first four fitts making 'one quart''. Given this edition was privately circulated there could be little public or critical response to the publication but even in the limited circle of Goodsir Smith's friends, reactions were very mixed (and critical opinion in the present day remains equally divided). Robert Garioch for one though shared Goodsir Smith's own enthusiasm and the two exchanged correspondence written in what they quickly came to term 'Carotidian'.<sup>7</sup> Goodsir Smith also contributed an introduction in Carotidian style to Garioch's *The Masque of Edinburgh* (1954) titled 'A POOPLICK LATTER, ODDRASH OR MAUNAFASHTULE: By Guid Schir Skidderie Smithereens, Barrelnut'. *The Masque of Edinburgh* itself suggests more than slight traces of Goodsir Smith's influence, the book is also dedicated to him (it should though be acknowledged that influences were reciprocal):

*A maist camsteerie widdle steers up the hale clamjamphrey. Zeinty Teinty, Tithery Mithery an Irky Pirky tak a tawrry rope an set aboot the Reverend John Thomson an the Very Reverend Jock Tamson. John Knox casts his duddies tae the wark wi shouts o 'Heave awa lads, A'm no deid yet.'*<sup>8</sup>

MacDiarmid too was supportive of the book and provided a foreword to the revised edition of 1964 in which he writes of the book, among much more effusive praise, as 'a tremendous breakthrough of the old

wild spirit' (C.C. p. 15). Not all of Goodsir Smith's friends shared such approbation however, notably Norman MacCaig who has dismissed the work as rubbish and a waste of time and talent.<sup>9</sup>

MacCaig was forthright in letting the author know his views on the book, but, undaunted, Goodsir Smith continued work on the book throughout the 1950s. This led to the appearance of the revised and expanded version of 1964. All citations in the discussion which follows are drawn from this definitive edition, re-issued in 1982.

### 3

As the latter half of the book's title suggests *Carotid Cornucopius* is overflowing, literally, with ideas and techniques drawn from and developed from the many and diverse literary experiments from the 30s and 40s (and 50s). There are antecedents for instance in Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as well as in the early Beckett, notably *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934).<sup>10</sup> Allusions to both of these writers abound, Joyce is omnipresent, not only in pervasive puns but deep in the weave, from the book's food and (pseudo) mathematical fixations to the endless metamorphosis of characters' names. Beckett too is invoked explicitly in 'The mair kicks agane the procks the batter', (C.C. p. 93) and more obliquely in 'oxgamenatioun and muddified quagmiratioun', (C.C. p. 40), which echoes *Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination Of Work In Progress*, with Goodsir Smith cheekily inverting the implications of clarification in the latter to those of obfuscation in the former.

The notorious 'Work In Progress' itself surfaces repeatedly here as, say, 'Shame-us's *Week in Disgrace* or *Shennanigan's Sleep*', (C.C. p. 89). Such allusions also reach well beyond the contemporary climate of experimentation to embrace the likes of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, as MacDiarmid stresses in his foreword, François Villon's ('Frenchy Villain') *Le Testament*, where Villon's 'item' refrain mutates through 'bitem', 'spitem' to 'shitem' (C.C. p. 26). The list can be expanded to draw in Urquhart's work on Rabelais, Dunbar and Burns as well as Lewis Carroll. Lists themselves are an integral feature in *Carotid Cornucopius*, again, as in Joyce, David Jones or the later work of MacDiarmid.

In these Goodsir Smith incorporates all of his likes and dislikes, from writers to Edinburgh bars, to periodicals, his friends ('Rumboat Beerloch' C.C. p. 35), political or religious creeds and denominations on to more



purely perversely linguistic catalogues. In the passage below 'Colickie Meg' decries her Husband 'Duncod', 'rudicalling him in publics and refarting to him in dozent crumpery bay sic aprudrious happythrets as -':

shyster, ragman, swicker, tyke, runtbug, troker, rumpelfyke, receiptter, pleuk, corbie, clype, scut, skrunk, maltraitor, whittie-whattie, ratshyte, flabbituimgibblet, blackleak, sklunkey and flackney, Jewdust Misscarryout, Meanteeth, Lizardyellow di Turnme, Cattyslime, renigger, toady, turdeater, slorpspittle, snot-hunter, pockthank, jakesoil, schneed, schniffkins, smell-feets, slabbersaft, trickler, sickliphant, soupleslicker, soapsnaivel, liblab, sleebuits, recrawant, airse-creeper, turdgiversator, flook-mou'd flinderkin, flairdie, foe's faex, puke, ponce, primp, saulcouper, soup-the-causey, flichter-lichtie, slairk, cutling, loofcreeshit blackneb, bildker, trimper and primmer, slimeserver, dambadoxter, turntup, torncunt, Swicker of Prey, Quister, Creeshling, Filthief Crumbelist and gnathonicallouse, paumitchy, bumsucking baboon.

(C.C. pp. 58-59)

This is a characteristic extract and illustrates the kinds of linguistic acrobatics to be found throughout *Carotid Cornucopius*. While on the face of it this is a relentless helter-skelter catalogue of vocabulary-corruption, portmanteau coinings, convulsed, if vaguely familiar, famous or infamous names ('Jewdust Misscarryout' / Judas Iscariot) there are nonetheless inbuilt structural and rhythmic principles.

In terms of rhyme and rhythm for instance, in 'corbie, clype, scut, skrunk, maltraitor, whittie-whattie, ratshyte', we can pick up on the alliterative opening run of hard 'c's giving way to the clustered 'a's while 'clype' is echoed with 'ratshyte'. There is too a perverse structural logic here. The passage moves from the opening two syllable terms of abuse, accelerates to three syllables, pauses for breath with a few disrupted 'proper' names before picking up speed again and repeating the cycle before culminating with the conclusive 'bumsucking baboon', the whole section intermittently punctuated with a few more extravagant coinings, 'gnathonicallouse'. Goodsir Smith himself would have found such a dissection highly amusing but it is worth recognising the underlying calculation in the construction of what seems on the surface an undisciplined and wild tirade, a bizarre mutation, amounting to parody, of Joyce's stream of consciousness.



Again there is much here which prefigures the development of postmodernist literature. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* Linda Hutcheon observes:

Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, Goodsir Smith, like MacDiarmid, was never slow to illustrate his familiarity with the international avant-garde, which, along with an affectionate nod to Joyce, is one of the things he is up to here. But this high allusiveness, the challenge mounted in the attendant *mocking* of Joyce, among many others, is an early example of what contemporary criticism terms intertextuality. Writing of Joyce himself David Lodge has observed:

– we know that books are made out of other books as much as they are made out of their author's personal experience, and it would be impossible for a contemporary novelist with any kind of artistic ambition, however modest, not to have felt, if only indirectly, the influence of the greatest innovator in modern prose fiction.<sup>12</sup>

There are, as we will see, many further innovations characteristic of postmodernism with which, in the 90s, we have become familiar. However some indication of the ground-breaking nature of *Carotid Cornucoptus*, published in 1947, can be suggested by reference to the remarks of Gerald Graff. Discussing postmodernism, albeit sceptically, Graff observes that, by the mid 1950s:

– art and literature have increasingly incorporated a sense of irony and scepticism toward art's traditional pretensions to truth, high seriousness, and the profundity of 'meaning'.<sup>13</sup>

As suggested in Chapter Five then, Goodsir Smith is functioning in an essentially post-visionary era and his work in this book as in *Under The Eildon Tree* demonstrates a very early manifestation of diverse elements which came to dominate postmodern literature. We can pursue some of these ideas by further developing an area of clear correlation with Joyce, the coining of portmanteau words, an area indicating the extent to which in some respects

we can see Goodsir Smith's abdication from that 'high seriousness'.

This is a tactic Goodsir Smith will happily take to extreme and bizarre lengths, as in, for instance, 'Greasethecatsairsemitherheresacustomer'. But while many such examples are primarily humorous or inflammatory many too display wry convolutions of cynical and cutting observation on the fragility of veneers or social hypocrisy. Duncod's lack of an heir is summed up as a consequence of his being 'uncuntscious' (C.C. p. 48); a compression which brings together his constant alcoholic inebriation and resultant flaccidity, impotence and literal unconsciousness with an obliviousness to sex and his wife's disinclination to have anything physically to do with him.

In the wake of one of many frenetic linguistic tussles between Meg and Duncod they are described as having 'dismayed it up' (C.C. p. 58). A tentative resolution all too acutely familiar of many a domestic reconciliation. Similarly in this respect there is 'Lat there be no monalising at the bawr' (C.C. p. 95). A neat inversion of the drinker's dictum, aptly shackling moralising with monologue.

In *Finnegans Wake*, a prime candidate as the first postmodernist novel, James Joyce employed metathesis, an approach whereby the word 'crops' provides a hybrid of the words 'crops' and 'corpse', so conjuring a web of not immediately obvious semantic correlations.<sup>14</sup> Goodsir Smith's approach is similar though often seeming more akin to phonetic mutation or mutilation than a term like metathesis entails. So, epithets can become 'happythrets' (C.C. p. 58), as with 'monalising' and 'dismayed' creating diverse and ironic semantic collisions in implication.

Lexical convolutions such as these though are complemented and complicated by typographical disjunctions, the continual metamorphosis not only of names but of scenes, ages, weights, features and centuries (*Carotid* is achronological in the extreme) as well as perpetual puns: 'Ye cannae haud a guid meale doun!' (C.C. p. 65), a quick cut at Scottish drinking machismo). Further, the text is scattered around cartoon-style illustrations (by Rendell Wells) akin to Jarry's marionettes, of the Auk as *Carotid* himself. These in conjunction with the text blur distinctions between the author, Sydney Goodsir Smith a.k.a. The Auk, the 'Auktor' who prowls amid his creation passing comment and deciding plot progression in the midst of the book, and *Carotid*, also portrayed as an Auk. This too is technically prefigurative, recalling the multiple

personae of *Under The Eildon Tree*, an approach summed up by Linda Hutcheon:

Narrators in fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate – or resolutely provisional and limited – often undermining their own seeming omniscience.<sup>15</sup>

Both of these approaches converge in *Carotid Cornucopius* while an already daunting conglomeration is further complicated by often extensive footnotes, parenthetical and disruptive 'explanations': 'INTOPEER-ACTION BY HUMILE AND LUG-BEGOWLIN AUK' (C.C. p. 121). Meanwhile the entire concept of 'the book' is in itself mocked, drawing attention both to its fictionality and to the book as object, with the inclusion of spoof citations of 'OTHER GURKS BY GUDE SCHIR SKIDDERIE SMITHEREENS', and a 'Bibication' to 'Roberto Garioch' in Carotidian.

The text as well as 'the story' is further disrupted by the incorporation of numerous pseudo-poems, songs, riddles and 'tang-tweezers'. Such aspects can be obscurely allusive and tie to related areas of intertextuality, parody and mockery, in the example below Goodsir Smith offers us his own version of a merz-poem:<sup>16</sup>

Zzz! Zzz! Zzz! Zzz!  
 Bomph! Bomph! Bomph!  
 EEE-ILL-UMP. FLUP. UMP. OPP!  
 Boomph! Boomph! Boomph! opp click!  
 Licht-blik!  
 'Wazzat? Seezadram!'

(No, it's no Kurt Zquhitters ava! Ech! Ech!)

(C.C. p. 111)

Even if the reader is unfamiliar with the works of Kurt Schwitters this extract remains an amusing onomatopoeic-phonetic representation of an awakening drunk. In this instance the drunk is Colickie Meg, though the characters of the book remain unanimously pickled throughout. The cause of the disturbance, the source of those 'Bomph's!' and 'Boomph's', are the kicking heels of her soon to be born, and fully formed, son 'Roriekin' beating on the confines of her 'bagsone wambe'.

4

In the midst of this textual, allusive and linguistic cacophony though a tale does gradually surface through the weave. This revolves around the picaresque and grotesque adventures, histories and debaucheries of Carotid and his motley crew of cronies. The central character, 'Carrotty' himself, is a raconteur of formidable proportions whose prize possession is the 'Satyriconte' by 'Tightarse Potronius' which he has had bound in the skin of 'the noted Blues Slinger Lilybeth Bamboo MacBollochie'(C.C. p. 27) his former and latterly deceased mistress. More specifically, the skin from her right breast; the flaying process is lovingly enumerated as are the considerable merits of the organ formerly contained therein.

Such rampant deviations are not atypical of the activities under way here and appropriately, given such characters and such a text, neither the narrative nor the 'Auktor' or author are to be trusted or relied upon. 'Caput Ane' deals not too obliquely, relatively speaking, with Carotid's discursive introduction of the rest of the cast. 'Caput Twa' moves on to deal more loosely and aberrantly with 'Duncod, least Drouk of Hardbile'. By 'Caput Shree' however, in which the Auktor has promised us the story behind Rorie, the dislocations have escalated and the Auktor opens with a 'Word in Digress' (yet another pun on Joyce) in which he confesses:

With maist appoplenergetic ginnureflectiouns twawords the attonative Ruder, I maist unforom yous that sence the lost or Saicund Fitt your maist groand-grivelling, but aye beguillfou Auktor has (I cannae affpot the rumleakintilnt nous) lowsit all traits, vastages, wake, releaks, scints, traiks, pisstes, rackairds and pinters til the whorabowts of the personalipotagonistes and Dramantics Principes of this Sagga.

(C.C. p. 71)

We are to believe then that the tale is running free, its Auktor loose in the midst of his own chaos. Essentially though this is a prime example of, as Hutcheon has it above, the Author 'undermining' his 'own seeming omniscience', a calculated abdication of responsibility. We are constantly reminded of the artificial nature of this fictional context, wrapped up in 'unlikely stories mostly'.<sup>17</sup> On one level this is a correlative of postmodernism's integrated discourse on the nature of, and inadequacy of art and literature; on another though it is also

an intriguing extension of the parameters of the picaresque, with the author's own fictional persona, the Auktor, pursuing adventure within the confines of the ongoing construction of the fiction itself.<sup>18</sup>

Although our Auktor does not always oblige us by fulfilling his promises we do, after much circumspection, finally reach the promised account of Rorie's birth – in 'Caput Sex' rather than 'Caput Shree'. Obtusely, 'Caput Fowr' consists of the Auktor's prologue or 'PROPOLOGUE', 'Sained, AUK, his mirk, (an extinct bard)' (C.C. p. 84-85). 'Caput Fift' goes on to tell of the preparations for Rorie's birth and culminates in a surrealistic and supernatural vision of Rorie's future. The surrealistic qualities of the writing are sustained in 'Caput Sex' as we come at last to Rorie's entry to the world, fully grown and raring to go. His startling dimensions are detailed by analogy with the wildly mutated landscape of Edinburgh in which these nefarious activities take place:<sup>19</sup>

At berth he was folly-grawn in bulka stounds of the weird. Twa magnumfucent tostes or bulwarks swuck and swangk abowt his knease-knops marrilie, clunking thegoater like the polling bolls of Sanct Gules' Huge Gurk douring Ballsampling Wake; his wharwithout or Jokie Topmast as chairpie and knabbilie and fratfullie skyscroting as the Scotch Mountumescent; with muckle hairsweitatioun upon the heid, reid as a hairyowle, upon the upper lab whar it sprootit fearteen munches on stulka sode, upon the chafts like a bleezin buss, upon the kist like the fleshing sheeld of bricht Ah'llkillye's, and eke allswaur utter abowt the baddie crapoweroyal, ip, dun, iver and ondear, as crammasie and krassivie as that of his ain mounsterous firefaither Carotid ohmsel.

(C.C. pp. 127-128)

It has often been remarked, originally by MacDiarmid, that Goodsir Smith, in *Carotid Cornucopius*, does for Edinburgh what Joyce did for Dublin. Scenes such as these however also bring to mind the work of another not too distant relative, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Miller's equally surreal and picaresque Paris (or New York) is a kindred landscape, with the aerial, tower dominated section on Rorie above echoing Miller's hallucinated vision of the Eiffel Tower spurting champagne. As with Miller in full spate so too in *Carotid* as the book 'progresses' there is an ascent, or descent, into a manic escalation of a calculated incoherence. As the characters and their activities become

increasingly rampant and inebriated the language itself is contorted in accompaniment, the 'Auktor clearly along for the ride, the far from omniscient drunk between the lines.<sup>20</sup>

Each 'fitt' is preceded with the Auk's portrait, in 'Caput Ane', pouring from one bottle with seven to hand, in 'Caput Ochto', pouring the last. This scales the acceleration (or degeneration), with the bottles declining in inverse proportion to the chapters accumulated under the reader's belt just as the 'fitts' get shorter and more compacted and levels of incoherence become more pronounced: consciousness streaming away. The nature of this process is already traceable by 'Caput Shree' in which Duncod and Carroty find themselves incarcerated in the 'polis orifice' (C.C. p. 73) as a consequence of Carroty's impulse to topple seventeen 'polutesmen or boobies' helmets 'airse-ower-tip'. Here Goodsir Smith allows us to listen in on the clamour in the 'drunk tank':

'Heave-along, there, heave-along!'  
 'It's brisselin!'  
 'Havanalon noes!'  
 'O, bear-on, Titti mia,' quoath the sin and heiro of Maregrainn,  
 Quim of Fey  
 'G'awa, hen,' sidhe shee.  
 'A gal Ah had, but, Alance! Ah lost her.'  
 'Percevarol, but dermot truist 'em.'  
 'O, leave her olone.'  
 'I'm gaen along. To pine. For pep in us is bref and a carle's but  
 mortel; I'm chary o' mair tools and hammers.'  
 'Wham o' Bordello have I owrelained sae armourouslie and  
 fureouslie?'  
 'Ane jolie cou in sacred pantz that girn all day.'  
 'Oh, Syd!'  
 'Man, drink hard, do!', douridamruptit Sair-i-sin.

(C.C. p. 76)

The resultant lexical cacophony, a sustained barrage of prolonged misunderstandings, tangential allusion and abrupt and oblique collocation creates on one level a kind of aesthetic anarchy, disrupting and confounding the reader's expectations. Yet at the same time on closer examination, and given a gradually assimilated familiarity with Goodsir Smith's linguistic approach, a sequence such as this reveals a surprising and characteristically paradoxical level of verisimilitude.



Essentially an accurate technique capturing an overall soundscape of intermingling voices, crossed conversations further disrupted by liberal doses of alcohol. Areas such as this illustrate the kind of approach MacDiarmid had in mind when he wrote, in his foreword to the book, of Goodsir Smith's use of 'inter-sense effects of his own invention'.<sup>21</sup>

Goodsir Smith basically sidesteps conventional methods of literary criticism and construction to approach the reader from unexpected angles, creating derailing effects inaccessible by more traditional tactics. Again in this respect many of these strategies have become familiar as staples of postmodernism. So in *Carotid Cornucopius* the inter-weaving and juggling of language itself is of more importance than the weave of plot or structure; Goodsir Smith both mocks and discusses plot and structure here. The visual qualities of the text, the typeface, (prefiguring later concrete experimentation) in conjunction with the enforced dissection of individual items of vocabulary are more important and suggestive than any study of characterisation; again, appropriately, characters are in perpetual flux.

The potentially aural qualities or effects on the reader's inner-ear (or otherwise, could a reader be found) are in the same way more important than scenario or symbolism. Here scenario too is mocked through the perpetually metamorphic, surrealist extremes to which it is subjected, just as symbolism is ridiculed in the absurd *phallic* extremes employed at the birth of Rorie. Overall *Carotid* serves to destabilise any remaining notion of 'the primacy of artistic truth', subordinate here to the conglomerate texture of the book virtually as artefact, superseding derivable 'meaning', again this corresponds to the idea of the post-visionary discussed earlier. In this respect Gerald Graff, in turn citing Jacob Brackman, draws attention to another area of postmodernism pertinent to *Carotid*, specifically, just such methods of defusing easy meaning:

Jacob Brackman, in his brief but illuminating study, *The Put On*, describes this device in art and social behaviour as an attempt to forestall by ridiculing in advance the raising of the traditional question of what a work of art means: 'We are supposed to have learned by now that one does not ask what a work of art means'.<sup>22</sup>

Such an approach is characteristic of both *Carotid Cornucopius* and *Under The Eildon Tree*, as in both works, the ideas of meaning, intent,



objectives, come under discussion as integral parts of the works themselves. However, although there is much here that is prototypical of the postmodern, and these books, with *Colickie Meg*, stand as important seminal works, certain distinctions, or at any rate, reservations, should be made. A major component of postmodern literature too often, if sometimes understandably, overlooked, is humour, and we should not forget that this was Goodsir Smith's primary motivation in *Carotid*. As the preceding chapters of this study indicate, Goodsir Smith, like Gerald Graff, would have no time for the ultimate postmodernist stance on the meaninglessness of art. For all that he recognises the limitations of what art may achieve he sees that as, in many ways, a product of a damaged or inadequate society, not by any means unaffected by political expediency, a factor in itself which suggests that art may have potentially sharper (political or sociological) teeth than is often credited. In the same way, while Goodsir Smith is certainly an accomplished scholar, a request, say, for his views on the epistemological validity of silence, would almost certainly have been greeted with hoots of derision.

This suggests a number of other aspects of *Carotid* which should be borne in mind. In a discussion of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Anthony Burgess has dealt with the idea of the text as a dense palimpsest which can, 'set jangling all the phonetic and etymological associations which the mind is capable of accommodating'.<sup>23</sup> Burgess's specifics here apply equally to some of the effects achieved by *Carotid Cornucopius*: 'effects' which could be termed as something akin to a kind of textual/aural amphetamine. As you attune to the book's style and immerse yourself in the dense, allusive texture, your mind begins to race and fly with it, to 'jangle', a process of mimesis rather than analysis. The effect when reading MacDiarmid's *In Memoriam James Joyce* is remarkably similar. Interestingly, it is in a discussion of *that* poem that Burgess, in a totally different context, follows up the suggested implications of his remarks on *Finnegans Wake*. Defending MacDiarmid's poem against the usual charges that it is *not* poetry, he coincidentally encapsulates an integral feature of *Carotid*, Burgess remarks that the positive defence of the work, 'is written in the response of our pulse and our imaginations', it is also intriguing to note in passing that Burgess also cites Ronald Stevenson's phrase 'Cencrastus Cornucopius'.<sup>24</sup>

While this is an ostensibly (deceptively) simple remark it is one Goodsir Smith himself would have easily related to and it is nearer to pinpointing the meaning of meaning in literature than many a critic would care to acknowledge. If *Carotid Cornucopius* is many things, from

a densely experimental, seminal postmodern text, to a scathing attack, at once intensely intellectual and juvenile, on bourgeois values, on figures of authority, on posturing of all kinds – particularly in writers, it is plainly on its high energy level that much of its meaning is to be found. 'It' is essentially a simple one, if too often smothered, and it pervades Goodsir Smith's work from start to finish, from genre to genre. Live your life to the full and do not let *that* be smothered in hypocrisy, self deceit or delusion, do not accede to oppression whether of the political hue or to the small and claustrophobically minded wherever manifest. The linguistic vigour of *Carotid* is life affirmative, the exuberance and delight in language itself mirroring, encouraging and celebrating a delight in life, for all that its vagaries are present enough in the work and never shrugged off or glossed over.

In this respect it is well worth bearing in mind the oft told tale of the gales of laughter, recalled by Nora Joyce, emanating from her husband's 'work-in-progress' room. In this, Goodsir Smith would concur, as he observes of his own work-in-progress:

*Sobersads can never see  
Cornu's copious vinveritie!*

(C.C. p. 87)

Or, as he puts it, rather more succinctly, 'Tak it or lowp it' (C.C. p. 85).

## 5

During the early to mid 1950s as work was ongoing on the poems which would eventually appear as *Figs and Thistles*, on *Carotid Cornucopius* and on other works such as Goodsir Smith's *A Short Introduction to Scottish Literature* he was also becoming increasingly interested in more specifically aural and dramatic potentialities in his work. An early manifestation of this inclination was his endeavour to produce a stage adaptation of *Carotid Cornucopius*. The result was the still unpublished manuscript for *Colickie Meg*, titled more fully on the second page of the mss, *The Rutt of Spring or The Merrie Life and Dowie Daith of Colickie Meg The Carlin Wife of Ben Nevis*.

The close relationship between the two texts is immediately signalled in the duplication of dense linguistic weave and literary acrobatics, the portmanteau coinings and pervasive allusiveness. Similarly, save for a few minor characters, the 'Dramanticks Puirsinners' too remains the same, with the Auktor himself a central figure, prepared as ever to participate in discussion of the fictive landscape he inhabits. Carrotty for instance observes:

I never could undercomstomach it, Auk,  
 Hou a wee bit spunky o' a mannikin like you  
 Ever mismanaged to conceive o' the invention  
 O' siccan a Lord and Load o' Creation  
 Ay, an Recreation and even o' Repetition, as mysel-

(C.M. p. 10)

As in *Carotid* no attempt is made to encourage us to suspend our disbelief, on the contrary, we are led into consideration of the nature of the ongoing construction as it unfolds. So far as construction itself is concerned, Goodsir Smith is equally as dismissive of conventional dramatic structure as he is of the conventions governing the novel. Again, as in *Carotid*, conventions are mocked in his spoof title page and customary pseudonym: 'Gude Schir Skidderie Smithereens the Anerlie Mythificator'. In the same way, wilful circumnavigation is the order of the day, as the structural breakdown featured on the title page clearly indicates:

A Ploy or Diversi-teaziment  
 in  
 Twa Sack-suctions and an Introvale,  
 thegaiter with a Prelooke and eke  
 a Peppibogue, and bencluttering a  
 Fooll Corpse de Balleyhoo, a Witches'  
 Saubath, Strumptease and monie ither  
 idle Tracasseries, Ongauns, Dirrydans,  
 Tomphoolossipheeins etc bats nuits pots  
 usw

The work as a whole aims for something approaching an only semi-orchestrated chaos, with Goodsir Smith, while employing many of the devices already discussed with regard to *Carotid Cornucopius*, pushing

even further in the development of disruption techniques. Textual chaos is exacerbated here as the script is intercut with suggestions of possible or alternative abridgement (p. 75-6 respectively). With regard to the latter, the Auktor is brought on to suggest:

We're a wee thing ahint the skedaddle, Duncod;  
 Sae we's tak the lave o' your Roster as read,  
 And hip, scoop and jimp til paginaction ochty-sex.

(C.M. p. 76)

This instruction is further complicated by the textual direction, which follows, to: 'Continue after asterisk \* on page 78 Chorus of animal noises', effectively divorcing the Auktor from the Author. The point is we're being played with, because you *do* check to find out which works: the \* duly appears and the material coheres, 'ochty-sex', or 86, causes major disjunction. This kind of toying runs throughout the play as the reader is coerced into cross-referencing every direction, instruction, alternative or possibility until the capacity to assimilate is on the verge of overload, as in *Carotid* the challenge to expectation and possibility is overt.

This kind of literary anarchism is aided and abetted by the provision of alternatives to the poems and songs which interlace the play, from either earlier or from further on in the text, a tactic which lends to the prevalence of parenthesis to a parodic degree:

(RORIE descends into audience where Jeep is waiting. COVEN continues dancing and singing. None notices RORIE. He returns (Singing verse 7 of Alternative Song (P 73) -if this is being used) with long ladder unstrapped from his vehicle. He tip-toes, singing quietly, towards Balcony with Orchestral clashes for each step. DUNCOD turns round noticing him)

(C.M. p. 79)

The combined impact of these diverse techniques is closer to the edge of cacophony than to orchestration, unlike *Carotid*, trying to deal with the disruptions of *Colickie Meg* can quite literally give you a headache. This may suggest an intriguing if rather negative aesthetic direction but in purely literary terms the play stands with *Carotid* as a work of seminal experimental importance in the development of Goodsir Smith's work.

Not only in its prefiguration of postmodernist aesthetics but in signalling his preoccupation with drama and work conceived for radio broadcast as well as, in the 60s, for television.

However, while the play succeeds in literary terms and remains a fascinating document as a text there are perhaps insurmountable problems when it comes to consideration of *Colickie Meg* as a script for viable performance. This in turn suggests some interesting extra-textual implications here. In particular there is the sheer pervasiveness of intrinsic narrative commentary on the ongoing narrative itself, a factor in *Colickie Meg* far outweighing the use of the same technique in *Carotid Cornucopius*. In addition to several pertinent examples cited above there are a number of further suggestive interpolations worth examining more closely.

As in areas such as textual disjunction and disruption of narrative, Goodsir Smith's achronological inclinations are pushed to extremes in *Colickie Meg*. The play's scenario is termed 'alltime' and in one notable sequence Carroty illustrates the confusions of longevity in a muddled cataloguing of wars: 'War? Whit war? What year is this? / I'm aa mixtie-maxtie wi my dates' (C.M. p. 15). Following a rapid run through of history's possibilities, Meg finally relents in exasperation and provides the information that (at this stage in the play) it is the '45 and the rising of the 'Jokiebooties or Jinkaboots'. Carroty is astonished, 'Is that *this* year,' (C.M. p. 16). This attributes a kind of muffled omniscience to the characters and recalls the use of history's cyclic patterning in *Under The Eildon Tree* while at the same time illustrating the malleability of this scenario. Still, if Carroty is confused by the nature of the scenario in the midst of which his creator has placed him he *does* display faith in his Auktor and shows willing to collaborate with him in introducing alterations to the nature of his 'reality':

I fear I canna keep up  
Wi the wars at aa these days.  
Ay, my mummerie's mulderan, Auk,  
Ye maun dae sunkots about it, I dout.

(C.M. p. 16)

On a clearly related tangent later in the play, the Auktor is repeatedly taken aback by his characters displaying knowledge of the plot they're not supposed to have, sometimes at odds with his own plans. Speculating on this anomaly, the Auktor muses:

It looks as gin I've gotten twa-three  
Deidaffruent stories mismaggled up.<sup>25</sup>

(C.M. p. 71)

Other such examples pervade the text, 'Queerlike wey they hae o' speakin / In this pub' (C.M. p. 68) but, while much of this commentary is attendant to Goodsir Smith's defusion of verisimilitude and mockery of dramatic form, as well as his own dialogue, there is an underlying suggestion of ironically recognised discontent on the author's part.

In the festschrift *For Sydney Goodsir Smith* the actor Ian Cuthbertson, a good friend of Goodsir Smith's as well as an occasional collaborator, remarked in his contribution 'Sydney and the Plays':

– as an actor and director of sorts, I never have found yet a way  
of sustained vocalisation of yon lingo.<sup>26</sup>

That the attempt was made is implicit in these remarks while the intimacy of the two's relationship finds further testimony in Cuthbertson's successful appearance in the lead role of *The Wallace*. Similarly and unbeknown to both at the outset, both men worked on their own translations of Jarry into Scots. A subsequent attempt to combine the best from the two versions was tacitly abandoned. Nevertheless, as regards the difficulties of 'yon lingo', a closer look at the stylistic conventions applied in *Colickie Meg* indicates that at the outset Goodsir Smith made a conscious effort to tone down the linguistic excess of his Carotidian style. Spelling conventions are simplified, the more elaborate and expansive portmanteaus are eliminated while compounds incorporating four letter components are far less pervasive than in *Carotid*. Once beyond the first thirty pages or so (the original ms runs to 112 pages) the distillation begins to break down as the vocabulary gradually becomes more complex and more scurrilous. The monologues too become more daunting in both length and linguistic difficulty.

Such aspects suggest that as proceedings unfolded Goodsir Smith himself quickly came to recognise the problems thrown up by this work and gradually casts caution to the winds. Such a suggestion can be seen as reflected in the undercurrents of commentary and asides dealing with the nature of the ongoing proceedings. At one point for instance Carroty corrects Jock Macleery's comment, 'I mean heid aff the axecution –', with 'Ye mean haud up the inaction' (C.M. p. 62).



Remarks such as this, given the context suggested above, can sound uncomfortably double-edged as regards the author's own viewpoint even given the irony of the context.

Carroty's 'haud up the inaction' in short, points to several very real problems confronting any potential production of this work. Given the plethora of highly surrealistic scenes in the play, the sub-aqueous birth of Meg's daughter Biddy for instance, as well as a number of scenes facing complications regarding the bounds of physical possibility (Biddy is a big and buxom seventeen years at birth), too much of the real action of the play ends up taking place offstage. Consequently a great deal has to be conveyed to the reader or audience through the dialogue rather than being dealt with directly or enacted onstage. This in turn puts excessive strain on the dialogue itself so that at times it can become both mechanical and contrived. The devious, witty and eye-twisting techniques employed to incorporate awareness of that contrivance as an integral theme with resonances and dimensions of its own, still fail to thoroughly defuse that central strain.

The main reason that *Carotid Cornucoptus* works is that in a novel a writer can do *anything* and get away with it. The stage though imposes a wholly different set of parameters within which a writer can work. Goodsir Smith was never one to acknowledge limitations in any area of his work and this is certainly the case with *Colickie Meg*. For that reason the play occupies a less comfortable position in the unravelling of Goodsir Smith's work than does his novel. Nonetheless the play remains a challenging and intriguing work unparalleled in Scottish literature, amply illustrating Goodsir Smith's probing into new areas of literature and possibilities. I would argue too that, given some ruthless editing, a performable version of *Colickie Meg* could be made to work. Equally, that given the prevalence of experimental works in contemporary Scottish literature and given the increasing relevance of Goodsir Smith in the development of that literature, *Colickie Meg* should be published in its existing form as testimony to important if imperfect experimentation.

## 6

Goodsir Smith however had other irons in the fire during this period. In terms of poetry, though reflecting his increasing interest in drama, there was the broadcast, on the 29 March 1949, of his *Orpheus and Euridice*. This was an adaptation and expansion of Elegy XII from *Under*



*The Eildon Tree*, subsequently published by Callum MacDonald in March 1955. In a similar vein was another long poem *The Vision of the Prodigal Son* which was written for the Burns bicentenary and broadcast on 25 January 1959. Again this work was published by MacDonald's in 1960. More central to the extra-poetic orientation of this chapter however was a further broadcast, on 30 November 1959, of Goodsir Smith's play, *The Wallace*, published by Oliver and Boyd in 1960.

*The Wallace* had its stage premier at the Assembly Halls in the 1960 Edinburgh Festival with Iain Cuthbertson in the leading role. Subsequently the play has not been widely performed though in the 70s it featured in the Arbroath Pageant. More recently the play was successfully presented at the 1985 Festival, once more at the Assembly Halls, but with Alec Heggie as Wallace; this was supplemented by a successful run at Musselburgh's Brunton Theatre.

Aside from the enthusiastic response of audiences, the 1985 production was notable for a few odd cross-references. Firstly, it was directed by Tom Fleming who had taken the role of Wallace in earlier radio and television broadcasts. More intriguingly *The Wallace* was coupled with Fleming's production of Sir David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (also with Heggie in the lead) and in both plays he employed the apron stage techniques used by Tyrone Guthrie in the 1948 production of *The Thrie Estaitis* – the first time the play had been staged since the sixteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Ironically it was this now almost legendary production which helped create the viable climate as well as the glimmering of an idea in Goodsir Smith's mind which would eventually see light of day as *The Wallace*. As far as the theatrical climate was concerned Goodsir Smith was not alone in appreciating the potential suggested in that 1948 production for the development, virtually the *establishment*, of a distinctive Scottish theatre, utilising the Scots language, Scottish history, affairs and society. Foundation work established primarily by James Bridie was developed by contemporaries of Goodsir Smith such as Robert Kemp, George Munro and Robert McLellan while Glasgow Citizen's Theatre (established by Bridie in 1943) was important in its provision of a forum for Scottish plays. It is worth bearing in mind too that *The Wallace* was the *first* Scottish play to be commissioned for the Edinburgh Festival.

Theatre then, has been a dubious place in Scotland for a variety of reasons, David Hutchison encapsulates some of these in his book *The Modern Scottish Theatre*:

9

There are ample records of medieval plays being produced in Scotland, and there is Sir David Lindsay's marvellously accomplished *Satire of the Three Estates*, presented in Cupar in 1522, but the departure of the court for London in 1603 and the attitude of the Presbyterian Church prevented further possible developments.<sup>28</sup>

The overall effect in the long term then was to allow little by way of a distinctively Scottish theatre to emerge between the medieval period and the twentieth century. The impetus of the Scottish renaissance in conjunction with attendant socio-political developments is only now, as we move towards the end of the twentieth century, beginning to see the accumulation of a solid body of Scottish drama.

*The Wallace* then, when it was first broadcast in 1959 was, if not out on its own, nevertheless at the forefront of that particular strand of theatrical experimentalism determined to reforge a native theatre. In this respect, if *The Wallace* is not so wildly and overtly innovative as either *Carotid* or *Collickie Meg*, it was conceived just as consciously as an endeavour to break new ground, to test and broaden the parameters of possibility for a specifically and quite self-consciously Scottish theatre.

## 7

We have seen from the outset of this study that Goodsir Smith could never resist an outlaw, with Wallace himself featuring significantly in the diverse personae employed even in the earliest poetry. Similarly, if we turn to Goodsir Smith's *A Short Introduction to Scottish Literature* (1951) we find that both Blind Harry's *Sir William Wallace* and Barbour's *The Bruce* figure significantly in his overview of Scottish literature. For all that, he is more guarded when, discussing the situation in the wake of Gavin Douglas, he comes to Lindsay's work:

Scottish literature now goes underground. Apart from the popular anti-clerical satires of Sir David Lindsay (1486-1555) full of robust ribaldry but of small poetic (as opposed to dramatic) value.

(A. S. I. p. 17)

What distinguishes *The Thrie Estaitis*, and more specifically the 1948 version, is that it was shortened and modernised by Robert Kemp in ways which revealed the potential of the form as a medium capable of dealing

with Scottish history while still rich in relevance to the contemporary situation. That is basically what Goodsir Smith achieved in *The Wallace*, in one more context which provided new ways to frame, present and explore ideas central to the whole body of work; ranging from the existentially potent Peter Morrison of early days to celebratory dissection and assertion of the fundamental egalitarianism which pervades so much of Goodsir Smith's thinking and approach to life. In this case, in very direct, immediate terms in a much more confrontational, potentially catalytic medium than poetry.

Lyndsay's work and Goodsir Smith in *The Wallace* have in some respects a good deal in common. Trevor Royle, writing in his *Companion to Scottish Literature* straight-forwardly sums up Lyndsay's main themes:

The work on which Lyndsay's literary reputation rests is also the first great play in Scottish drama: *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis in Commendatioun of Vertew and Vituperatioun*. The play gathers together in a dramatic unity many of Lyndsay's main public concerns: the abuse of temporal and spiritual power, the role of the king as head of the body politic, greed and lechery within the Church, and the oppression of the Scottish people by the nobility and the burgesses.<sup>29</sup>

The full title of the play in itself, along with the oppression of the Scottish people, signals a correlation to the essentially humanitarian, as well as the socialist-nationalist, character of Goodsir Smith's work. A constant, from *Skail Wind* through to his later celebration of that other outlaw Burns, in *The Vision of the Prodigal Son*. *The Wallace* though also deals with other issues cited above, from the abuse of power to the role of the king, while his scorn of the 'big high heid yins' pervades all of his work.

*The Wallace* is essentially straight-forward, following the rise of Wallace, opening in 1297, moving on through his conflicts with the Scottish lords, his eventual betrayal by Menteith, a final confrontation with King Edward at Westminster, leading to Wallace's death sentence in 1305 followed by the positive, outraged exit of Bruce, roused to fight another day. In this direct and uncomplicated development though a good deal of ground is covered, especially in the two major debates between Wallace with Bruce and Edward respectively.

Much of the debate with Bruce centres on who has the right to the Scottish throne conjoined to who has the right to command the, hopefully, combined forces of the various lords in battle with Edward's army. Here Wallace plays the archetypal outlaw iconoclast, taunting Bruce over the essential triviality of his prevalent concerns as well as forcing home the divisive nature of such debate:

It's ripe for Edward, ripe for Wallace –  
 Wad it were ripe for you and aa the lords!  
 But no! They'd liefer fecht wi Edward  
 Agane me, nor wi me agane Edward –  
 As they've dune or this, and as you've dune  
 Yoursel, Bruce. There's feck o' guid Scots bluid  
 Ye've let for the bonnie een o' Edward –  
 Or they fecht the tane wi tither like tykes,  
 Like you and Comyn fecht, bleedin  
 The land til beggarie for pride  
 – And ye speak til me o' pride!

(T.W. p. 54)

Although Bruce finally departs unconvinced Goodsir Smith slips in a characteristically existential edge with Bruce's parting words: 'I'll say this. Ye've sawn a seed of doubt.' (T.W. p. 60). A seed that bears fruit in the wake of Wallace's death, the culmination of a life as outlaw, validated in existential terms in its positive catalytic function in triggering the Bruce. For Goodsir Smith though, although the contexts may have altered, the tactics of the oppressor grow more (or less) refined, little changes, the need to resist authoritarian power goes on, the need for outlaws, sadly, seeming a constant. In an uncollected poem published in *Cencrastus* (no. 14), 'A New Ballant of John MacLean' he wrote:

Ah, John MacLean, what hae we here?  
 A splendid companie!  
 The Provost and Baillies o' Glasgow toun  
 All come tae honour ye.  
 For a reid-hot Bolshie and Scottish Nat,  
 A cheynge indeed be-Gob!  
 – The man they flung in Barlinnie Jyle  
 Hobnobbin wi the Nobs!

The sharp, bitter irony of these lines, a characteristic in much of Goodsir Smith's politically orientated work, suggests a vivid contemporary parallel in both tone and content to many of Wallace's comments and beliefs. This same jeering, satiric thrust echoes in Wallace's riposte to Bruce, berating him for hypocrisy and evasion as he falls back on his 'solemn / Knichtlie vows' to sidestep the issues of confrontation with Edward:

And when last did a Scottish or an English  
Or a French or ither Norman lord  
Haud til his bunden word gin it didna  
Sult him, juist?

(T.W. p. 55)

In this respect Tom Hubbard identifies a distinctive parallel in a discussion of the anthology *Foursome Reel* (1949). He notes of John Kincaid's contribution that he was drawn to 'the poem of dramatic presentation' seeing in it a 'socialist counterpart to the medieval morality play', and, he adds, 'The line of descent is from Sir David Lyndsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*.<sup>30</sup> While Kincaid's work is set in a more overtly contemporary context it is not difficult to identify a socialist ring to much of the commentary attributed to Wallace, comments with as much relevance for today as to their historical context:

In the end, my friends,  
We've nane but the folk; they've nocht  
To loss but life and libertie.  
But gin we've them, we've aa. They're Scotland,  
Nane ither.

(T.W. p. 61)

This kind of plain if rousing speech is characteristic of the play, as is the device of rephrasing points such as this for emphasis in the later meeting with Edward. The lines above for instance find their echo in a scene vividly illustrating the vast space which exists between the two men:

KING EDWARD

Your folk? Your natural lords – see them – !

Admit me as overlord and superior  
And arbiter of their kingdom. Who are  
You, a younger son of a petty knight,  
To deny me authority?

WALLACE

A kintra

Is its folk, sir, mair nor its lords.

(T.W. p. 148)

The play's themes then are approached without circumnavigation, it could be argued, weakeningly, without skilled artifice. One ambivalent and anonymous reviewer in the *T. L. S.* for instance opens by recognising the story itself as unassailable:

Here is a story, not so much of a single man but of a people, a people in arms against those they consider their oppressors, a people conscious of their common interest, of their nationhood, utterly divorced from their own nobility and acting independently of it, a common decent people, fighting single-handed against all the chivalry of a mighty king backed, as it was, by all the sanctions of the Church and state, a people in rebellion.<sup>31</sup>

A peculiar blend of the grandiose and the patronising, but the basic enthusiasm comes through. As far as patronising goes there's a good deal worse: 'Goodsir Smith – has made a reputation for himself as a writer of Lallans verse and, as a result, had the misfortune to be identified with the more lunatic fringes of Scottish Nationalism'. Still, while remarks such as this suggest a cautious approach, this writer, in common with many commentators on the play, does identify a number of problematic areas which must be acknowledged. Many of the secondary characters can seem shallow and two-dimensional, notably his women characters. Both of Wallace's lovers, Mirren Braidfute and her successor Ailish Rae are portrayed as devoted but not very bright with a propensity for emotional overkill:

DONALD

I'll awa out and hae a glisk around.

WALLACE

Ay, Donald.

*Exit DONALD. Storm.*

AILISH

Och, Will, ye dinna think – ?

WALLACE

Na, na, lassie. Juist bletherin.

I'm cantie the nicht, for the morn's

The day micht cheyngae aa.

AILISH

Ye're no gaun, Will?

Dinna gang!

WALLACE

Ay, I maun gang.

And I want Rob here, to be wi ye.

I'll need Donald for mysel.

Men at my back, ay! Yon's the haill airmie

O' Wallace nou! But no for lang!

AILISH

Will, dinna gang. Can Bruce no Come here?

(T.W. pp. 116–117)

Exchanges such as these are essentially mechanical, almost casual at times, and are too recurrent for comfort. Here too the language in its austerity, employed to strong effect elsewhere can sometimes lack vigour just as you are at times left wishing for a more complex, challenging dramatic structure. In a similar vein, certainly on the printed page, other scenes, particularly the taking of Wallace by Menteith, totter precariously near to melodrama.

Lastly in this respect there is Goodsir Smith's use of Scots and English 'chroniclers' whose lines open each of the five acts, updating the action, describing battles and journeys, while at the same time juxtaposing Scottish and English perspectives. While it is hard to see a way round the use of such a device, it does become intrusive at times as well as cumbersome.



In some ways then, Goodsir Smith's own remarks on Lyndsay's work, lacking 'poetic (as opposed to dramatic) value' could be levelled against his own play. However if *The Wallace* may indeed be held open to a charge of a lack of intellectual and aesthetic depth, we must remember that on one level his objective at the outset was to produce confrontational agit-prop and to present a passionate statement of ideals in as direct and accessible a manner as possible; he was *not* attempting to vie with Shakespeare in terms of poetic drama. To judge from the noisy, enthusiastic response of audiences, the main point, he succeeded in that primary objective.

Finally here, edging back towards Goodsir Smith's poetry, the critic and dramatist Ronald Mavor has said of *The Wallace*:

Mr Cuthbertson has a most convincing way with the language and he more than anyone else seems totally at home with Mr Goodsir Smith's words, but only in his trial, and once before when he disputes with Bruce, do they burn and sing.<sup>32</sup>

This is an accurate observation, but one, as Mavor makes plain, which does not damn the play. On the other hand though, for a language that *does* 'burn and sing' we need only turn to what is arguably Goodsir Smith's last great collection of poems, ranking alongside *Under The Eildon Tree*; *Figs and Thistles*, published in that same year, 1959, *The Wallace* was broadcast.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SKELETON ANEATH THE SKIN <sup>1</sup>

### 1

*Figs and Thistles* then was published in 1959, by Oliver and Boyd, and, like the earlier *So Late Into The Night*, is a collection of work spanning, in this case, the preceding decade. The work gathered in *So Late Into The Night* displayed a marked and surprising tonal unity, *Figs and Thistles* on the other hand, as could more logically be expected, is a much more variegated work, a totally different consistency, albeit, with unifying principles of its own. The book is essentially an amalgamation, or consolidation, of the diverse areas into which Goodsir Smith was probing at throughout the 1950s. In the collection for instance there are short lyrics, some redolent of the skeletal forms of 1950 vintage, others, of a subtly different kind, offering fresh refinements. Supplementing these there are a number of more structurally substantial poems such as 'The Grace of God and The Meth-Drinker' where social as well as political concerns come more to the fore. In addition there are two much longer poems reflecting Goodsir Smith's growing interest in drama and incorporating a great deal of reported speech to highly ironic effect (a technique employed to rather different ends in *Carotid Cornucopius*).

In broader terms too, looking at the book as a whole, there are other components at play providing a deeper harmony. *Figs and Thistles* sees a coalescing of the many devices, themes, styles and preoccupations characteristic of the entire spread of Goodsir Smith's work. There are the pulsations of perspective from subjective to objective, familiar since the tentative days of *Skail Wind*. Similarly this collection sees the most explicit expression of Goodsir Smith's fundamental egalitarianism conjoined to his most direct political commentary since the days of *The Deevil's Waltz*. This was in part a consequence of the Communist invasion of Hungary in 1956, an event which split the C.P.G.B. with many members resigning (and MacDiarmid, typically, rejoining). For Goodsir Smith though this marked an end to any sympathies he had left in that direction, sympathies seriously undermined by the events of, and his experiences during, the Second World War (see Chapter Two).

The book also incorporates a good deal of work centred on Goodsir Smith's fascination with the outsider, the outlan; focusing on diverse

personae drawn as existential catalysts. Many other areas here have their precedents in earlier forms: there are poems of disquiet and ominous threat, delving into subjective psychological regions, the looming threat of silence, the discomfiting desire for nullity, the role, if any, of the poet. Markedly too there is Goodsir Smith's meticulous attention to language and the manipulation of diverse tonal levels. The resultant weave of the book, the final amalgamation, produces a dense, wide reaching texture prefigured only by *Under The Eildon Tree*.

As with *So Late Into The Night* this all adds up to too substantial a collection to be examined altogether comprehensively, but, in order to indicate its diversity and texture and to explore its concerns and orientation as well as its correlations to other areas of Goodsir Smith's work, the book can usefully be broken down into two main sections each with their respective sub-divisions.

The book's first phase is made up of a clear movement through four distinctive groupings; the first comprises by now familiar Goodsir Smith love lyrics, the second is made up of poems of cosmic perspective, the third moves on to socio-political concerns while the fourth broadens out from that base to consider the role and function of the poet and poetry in society.

The mid-point of the book is marked by three rather idiosyncratic poems, 'To Li Po in the Delectable Mountains of Tien-Mu', a bacchanal featuring Li Po, Burns and, as is customary, the bard himself, all 'on the bash thegither' (F.T. p. 36), a hypothetical binge in the afterlife. 'The Year of the Crocodile', maintains the vaguely Japanese thread, and 'Scroggam', the latter dated 1950, presenting a light-hearted celebration of the theft, or reclamation, of the Stone of Destiny by Ian Hamilton and company. These poems provide a point of equilibrium preparing for the second phase of the book.

This divides into two sub-sections, the first sees a return to a series of love poems, but these are different and strange, a contrast to the familiar style of the opening poems; the second sub-section consists of two fairly long poems, 'translations' respectively from Blok and Tristan Corbière. A closer look at poems from each of these groupings will serve to build up some impression of the book's flavour and density, while also providing some indication and summation of the direction Goodsir Smith's work has taken.

Of the short selection of love poems opening *Figs and Thistles* several are particularly well known, notably 'Tranquillitie Tint' and 'Credo' which has been anthologised and discussed at length elsewhere, other poems

in this opening category though tempt closer examination.<sup>2</sup>

The poem 'For Release' provides a sharp illustration of the ways in which Goodsir Smith, while employing basic techniques he favoured from the outset, can still expand and develop these approaches, here he is much more direct and consequently effective in deploying his material. As so often, the poem uses objective observation as a starting point:

Snaw on the wind rives throu the sleepan toun  
Screichs owre the racklan winnock-brods and houls  
Its ourie lauchter in the lum.

(F.T. p. 5)

The implications of threat, of tranquillity under siege, are emphasised in contrasts of vocabulary, as the 'sleepan toun' is played off against the more violent associations with physical damage in 'rives', enhanced by the use of 'screichs', 'houls' and 'ourie lauchter in the lum', adding a flavour of the supernatural at work. The threat is further emphasised in that the ominous, aggressive sounds are linked to possible modes of entry, the chimney and windows.

The subjective root of the unease precipitated by such objective phenomena is identified in the lines which follow:

Sleepless, a bairn again, I courie doun  
Beglaumert, dumb  
Wi majestie and fear.

(F.T. p. 5)

Here too the use of 'beglaumert' (bewitched) picks up on the supernatural thread, but while the opening stanza establishes scenario and tone, the second moves into overtly subjective territory as scenes are interiorised:

In hait's an unco granderie  
As gin the elemental rage was mine  
As mine the wind-flaucht memories  
That come, infallible, of her –

(F.T. p. 5)

In effect the sanctuary of peace of mind is assailed by probing, uneasy memories, just as the body is threatened by the howl of the winds

seeking access, a point made explicit as the last stanza cuts to direct statement:

Me tempest-toss't, O Morphee, steek mine een!  
I ken her step, and liefer far wad be . . .  
The air birsles. Cauld. Ah, Queen,  
White and unmercifu! – Escape there's nane.

(F.T. p. 5)

The plea for nullity, the presence of the 'White and unmercifu!', the movement from objective to subjective to statement, are familiar methods of approach for Goodsir Smith. What makes 'For Release' stand out is the ease with which the intrinsically complex analogy is handled, the syntax is unwarped and we never lose sight of the opening image and context as can sometimes happen in the earliest poetry. The directness of the poem's movement, easy as ABC it seems, from scene setting to statement is impressive in its economy.

Related tactics are employed in 'Sonnet: A L'Hypocrite Lector', a short defence of the choice of love as a pervasive subject. The poem opens on a chorus of querying voices, 'Wha's he think he is?' (F.T. p. 10), concluding with a mocking attack on the poet's presumed arrogance:

– Luve til ither bards isna denied  
And, certies, isna his monopolie'.

(F.T. p. 10)

The second part of the poem consists of the bard's reply to such accusations framed as a disconcertingly frank, if tongue in cheek, proclamation of the pre-eminence of love in his own life:

His answer's semple, clear:  
To be her bard, she his muse  
For him existence justifies,  
And aa his follies' haill excuse-  
His greatness has been and aye is  
Nocht but the loein o this lass.

(F.T. p. 10)

While this both masquerades as, and *is*, a frank statement, (remember *The White Goddess*), the dice is loaded, for this is a transition point and

this the last of the love poems in the first section of the book. From this point onward subject and scenario broaden. This is characteristic of Goodsir Smith, typical of the ironic juxtapositions pervading *Under The Eildon Tree*, the multiple edge, cutting at his critics, his sonnet, himself, with a further barb thrown in with the title 'A L'Hypocrite Lecteur'. Once more too the defusion of artifice ties back to seminal postmodernism as well as further illustrating the post-visionary context discussed earlier.

Hard on the heels of this sonnet then come the cosmic perspective poems epitomised by 'Pole Star'. In this poem the magnitude and turmoil of Man's inner world is examined and exemplified by correlation to the strange core of the vortex Corrievreckan:

Birl, my teetotum!  
Whirl, man-atom, spin  
Dumbazed, adrift  
Stock-still in the mad-mid  
Centre o the mynd's whipt  
Infant Corrievreckan –

(F.T. p. 12)

The correlation then escalates as further parallels are drawn in through invocation of the cosmic vortex, with the Pole Star itself as its calm core:

And abune  
See there, aloft,  
Exact i' the meridian  
Ae muveless, standless sterne  
Ayebydan  
In the year's slaw circus round.

(F.T. p. 12)

Such diverse images are then woven together in a process reminiscent of 'join the dots', constellations emerge by linking the subjective, objective and cosmic:

Man, thirlit til your passions,  
In thocht aye seekan  
A wilyart truth in vain  
The passions thirlit in their turn

Til the mune's cheynge-  
Regaird her satellite eterne  
Hiech ower Corrievreckan  
And, man-atom, pray!  
Thy sel maybe thou can nocht turn  
- But the tides may.

(F.T. p. 12)

As in the best of Goodsir Smith's earlier lyrics, perspectives flicker and blur, fusing at once both levels of perception and terms of reference. 'Pole Star' exemplifies that sense of awe and mysteriousness to be found in the best Scottish lyrics of the 20th century. A metaphysical dynamic where meanings are implicit in the dynamics themselves rather than in direct statement, a process of mimesis, often drawn on by Goodsir Smith, with the poem's own internal logic mirroring the only semi-tangible movements of the mind.

This uncertainty or mutability of perspective is common to most of the poems in this section of *Figs and Thistles* and in the poem 'Apparances' it becomes an aspect of subject in itself. Time is rendered uncertain as the mind reads through landscapes, the eye perceives past patterning as through the veneer of a palimpsest. 'Apparances' employs a mist-wreathed urban Edinburgh landscape as a starting point and the main concern of the poem is with superficialities and with movements towards the real, paradoxically the almost tactile atmosphere of the opening exemplifies the *limitations* of surface perception:

November haar is blue  
Blue-gray in the efternune  
Mirkie gray-blue, sae that frae  
The Terrace ye canna see  
Lands ayont Forth as aye  
Ye can when the air is schere.

(F.T. p. 15)

As the mind guiding the poem, appropriately lurking beneath its own veneer, scans the shrouded cityscape, underlying, associated images are drawn to the surface, moving from the street to the sea to the bull-ring:

Juist ayont the nearest treen  
The streets o five-flat tenements



Mell wi the haar and wi the reik  
 That curls up white as cotton-wool  
 In the aa-inhauden blue.  
 And, here and there, see  
 Preen-pynts, peerie jags, o yalla licht  
 Like signals frae a boat at sea . . .  
 And it's nae mair nor three  
 Juist three-o-the-knock i' the efternune  
 – *A las tres de la tarde* in the burnan sun  
 Whar bulls dee fechtan in the sand –  
 And here is mair like derkenin trulie.

(F.T. p. 15)

These dislocations lead on to deeper resonances as the time-scale gives way and landscape becomes inextricably entwined, as it always is, with the mind's storings. As the poem is teased towards conclusion, images from the past (second) war rise up to touch on the present:

The birds, e'en, i' the braithless granes.  
 Are singan their compline sang  
 As they did at the black-o-nune  
 -Sang teeman like a ding o rain-  
 In a winter o war a wheen year syne  
 At the sun's eclipse – wancannie scene  
 Wi the great camp white  
 Under snaw, and the black ice dour.

(F.T. p. 15)

The movement of the poem is relentless and precise, leading into the revelatory, almost metaphysical, conclusion. Aptly once more, the ultimate concern of this poem is intimately related to the prevalent techniques and approach used, the movement from the relation of objective reportage and observation, through oblique reflection and projection, leading on to subjective insight, paring down perception to 'the skeleton aneath the skin':

Birds are a laicher ginse  
 Nor man (Men say) and yet I find

Mysel as semple, ignorant  
And led agley by looks and outward seemin  
As are they: this man, this I,  
That sees the skeleton aneath the skin  
Yet deems it Truth sets in the ee.

– When I think what I hae seen  
And throu what drumlie skadaws been,  
Then ken I weill the ee's a cheat  
And nae truth is but's dernit in the hairt.

(F.T. p. 16)

'Apparences' leads into the same stranger, subterranean, psychological zones of Goodsir Smith's best love poems, here from an unusually obverse angle, but in both categories the poems deal with issues far removed from their ostensible subject matter. On a related level too, 'Apparences' is also aesthetically illustrative of approaches pervading Goodsir Smith's work, whether in the circumnavigatous disruptions of *Under The Eildon Tree* or in the more blunt commentary on contemporary politics covertly incorporated in *The Wallace*.

Such ideas and tactical approaches are also notable in the poems 'Octopus', 'My World in Nether Winter' and 'The World's Winter' while the latter, with its Eliotesque objective correlative, much akin to the basis of 'Apparences', develops the expansive movement of *Figs and Thistles* by further broadening of subject matter. The objective correlative brought to bear in 'The World's Winter' is hinged around a winter landscape where, 'The snaw rives malorouslie' (F.T. p. 17), the winter's stark landscape emblematic of man's stunted possibility and inner bleakness. The 'hollow men' walk here, 'Heid doun, folk dwaible in a dwaum / Dowf wi libbit tyrannie' (F.T. p. 17), the scenario as bleak as any from *The Waste Land*. Much of the interior blackness derives from the environment, the social and political forces of repression or oppression creating like conditions in the individual's inner life. It is the inclusion of such factors which mark the shift into the book's third sub-section; new elements are drawn in, while at the same time, ideas discussed above are integral components still as the overall weave is expanded.

This can be illustrated by reference to 'The Grace of God and The Meth-Drinker' where connections between outward appearance, subjective elements and overall implications, as well as deviating perspectives and tone, remain central considerations closely linked to the poem's

social context. 'The Grace of God and The Meth-Drinker' is one of Goodsir Smith's best known poems, but assessments of its standing have been radically divergent. It has been termed acerbic, offensively condescending, compassionate, deeply ironic and extremely amusing, a degree of dissent in itself encouraging further investigation.

The most immediately impressive feature of the poem is its linguistic vigour, the portrait of the drunk is done in bold, vivid strokes, the kind of portrait which Goodsir Smith would 'scrawl' in charcoal in any bar of a given night, here he writes in a style recalling his own drawings and paintings, the drawings often almost savagely executed, his landscapes sharply focused and wildly coloured.<sup>3</sup>

In the poem he makes much use of alliteration, an approach which serves well in emphasising the staccato stagger of the drunk's passing and lends a striking and immediate vitality to the scenario:

There ye gang, ye daft  
And doitit dotterel, ye saft  
Crazed outland skalrag saul  
In your bits and ends o winnockie duds  
Your fyled and fozie-fousome clouts  
As fou's a fish, crackt and craftie-drunk  
Wi bleerit reid-rimmed  
Ee and slaveran crozie mou

(F.T. p 18)

The highly fricative vocabulary here is also effectively employed, capturing the ruggedness, as well as raggedness, of the meth-drinker while also mirroring the derangement within. The portrayal is on one level harshly objective and Goodsir Smith's choice of vocabulary is central in conveying the derelict's disastrous condition, describing the wake of his passage for instance, he writes:

Hidderie-hetterie stouteran in a dozie dwaum  
O' ramsh reid-biddie – Christ!  
The stink  
O' jake ahint him, a mephitic  
Rouk o miserie, like some unco exotic  
Perfume o the Orient no juist sae easilie tholit  
By the bleak barbarians o the Wast  
But subtil, acrid, jaggan the nebstrous

Wi'n owrehailan ugsome guff, maist delicat,  
Like in scent til the streel o a randie gib . . .

(F.T. p. 18)

The grisly power of these lines provides a highly convincing illustration of the onomatopoeic power of Scots, conducive to effects it is hard to imagine being achieved in (or translating into) English. One of the more skillful features of the poem is the variation in tone which is as liable to flicker and pulse as the use of perspective in the work discussed above. While the basic ugliness of the drunk is vividly drawn out for instance, there is, amid this, still a good deal of humour:

Dwaiblan owre the causie like a ship  
Storm-toss't i' the Bay of Biscay O  
At-sea indeed and hauf-seas-owre  
Up-til-the-thrapple's-pap  
Or up-til-the-crosstrees-sunk-

(F.T. p. 18)

Such intrinsically humorous incursions, particularly here, the extravagance of the analogy, set beside the poem's objective accuracy and fidelity, serve to prevent the poem being either sentimental or condescending, as well as offering a clear level of detachment. This said the full extent of the physical and mental damage on display is dealt with seriously and the plain brutality of the language here forms a stark tonal contrast with the good humour and the distancing preceding.

His toothless gums, his lips, bricht, cramasie  
A schere-bricht slash o bluid  
A schene like the leaman gleid o rubies  
Throu the gray-white stibble  
O' his blank unrazit chafts, a hangman's  
Heid, droolie wi gob, the bricht een  
Sichtless, cannie, blythe, and slee –  
Unkennan.

(F.T. p. 19)

This near skeletal image, the remaining flesh tattered and frayed, drooling, pallid and rotting, spares us nothing, yet the poem is leant

further complexity as further shifts in tone (and stance) become apparent in the concluding section of the poem:

Ay,  
     Puir gangrel!  
         There  
 -But for the undeemous glorie and grace  
 O' a mercifu omnipotent majestic God  
 Supreme eterne and sceptred in the firmament  
 Whartil the praises o the leal rise  
 Like incense ay about Your throne,  
 Ayebydan, thochtless, eternallie hauf-drunk  
 Wi nectar, Athole-brose, ambrosia – nae jake for  
     You-  
         God there!-  
 But for the 'bunesaid unsocht grace, unprayed-  
     for,  
 Undeserved-  
         Gangs,  
             Unregenerate,  
                 Me.

(F.T. p. 19)

Goodsir Smith's use of tonal and linguistic shading in this section is highly deviant, moving from mock obsequiousness to blatant sarcasm, he attacks social complacency and portrays the Deity as a drunk Himself, hooked on sycophancy, detached from realities in every way. The poem concludes then with heavy irony, an aesthetic double-take, the irony lies in turning such a scenario into a joke, the joke is on us and on the poet himself. It is not a funny poem, though there is humour here, there is also the tragic and terrible, a double de-bunking irony derived from co-existences, an archetypical feature of Scottish poetry (culture in general) and a crucial feature lying at the heart of Goodsir Smith's work.

The compressions of tone and levels of diction here, without seeming incongruous, is redolent of the Makars, as in the inversion of the selfish moral concluding, representing that underlying strain of mediaevalism in Goodsir Smith's work, a capacity largely unmatched in this century when he gets it right, as he does here. The extremes encompassed in this poem recall Gregory Smith's famous pronouncement, much loved

by MacDiarmid, on the intrinsic nature of Scottish literature:

Scottish literature is more medieval in its habit than criticism has suspected, and owes some part of its picturesque strength to this freedom in passing from one mood to another. It takes some people more time than they can spare to see the absolute propriety of a gargoy's grinning at the elbow of a kneeling saint.<sup>4</sup>

'The Grace of God and the Meth-Drinker' could have been constructed to illustrate this dictum and in these lines Gregory Smith identifies the essence of the power of this poem, one of the most powerful included in this section of *Figs and Thistles*, probably in the book as a whole.

Goodsir Smith, as suggested earlier, had his darker, more pessimistic side and this group of poems sees it to the fore in many cases, if finely integrated in the 'Meth-Drinker' as in *Under The Eildon Tree*, it can sometimes break the surface to become dominant, uncomfortably so in the closing stanza of 'Hogmanay Postwar' where he steps outwith the bounds of irony with a harsh and bitter sarcasm laden with disgust and despair:

A bairn greits in the cauldrie night-  
Nor man nor god can hear;  
The gods is deid and man is fou  
-Doomdrunk he pukes his Guid New Year!

(F.T. p. 20)

In the same vein though, moving from the socio to the more overtly political, it is worth noting that Goodsir Smith eschews political rhetoric for a more convincing politically emblematic poetry. His early empathy with Soviet Communism did not survive the second World War and politically orientated idealism in *Figs and Thistles* comes through reference to intrinsic human values, as in 'Vox Humana', a celebration of the survival in adversity of that fully human spirit:<sup>5</sup>

My name is nameless and aa names I hae-  
In Athens preed the waucht o hemlock-bane  
And wi the Jew was hangit on a tree,  
They cried me Wallace beaten til my knees,  
Wi Muir I plantit Trees o Libertie.

Hardie kent me, and Roberto Graham  
 And syne I soupt my jail-brose wi Maclean,  
 I am aa men that raised a cry,  
 Will ne'er be still again' man's tyrannie –  
 My luvver's words are breathed by men in chains.

(F.T. p. 21)

As in *The Wallace* and in the earlier *The Wanderer and Other Poems* Goodsir Smith presents his protagonists as existentially positive, outspoken outlaws on whom we depend for the truth, for the survival of basic human rights continually under threat. Once more too this is an explicit statement of personal alignment, the poet's role too, to stand back and speak the truth. A related position and approach is employed in 'A Bairn Seick', conjoining a potentially cataclysmic situation with a domestic scenario. The poem is not entirely successful in so far as the conjunction of the two settings can be *too* jarring, even by the standards of the Gregory Smith's Caledonian Antisyzygy:

*The Fowrt Plenarie Convene for Control*  
*O' the Atom Boomb has been postposuit*  
*Due til an epidemic, amang the delegates,*  
*O' thrush . . .*

(F.T. p. 23)

Sleep, sleep my seick Katrine,  
 Your mither's newlie-openit bud,  
 Her flouer and her fruct.  
 Sleep my lassie. Sleep.  
 Until she's grown til woman. Till . . .

(F.T. p. 23)

Although such stark contrast can seem to break the poem, it can be argued that the harshness of the contrast is a major part of the point, if not *the* point, but while it certainly *does* make the point, it does not make for wholly convincing poetry. Unusually Goodsir Smith seems to be straining here, more concerned in forcing his subject matter than sustaining his poetry, effectively the poem is subordinate to the issues it confronts and the stress shows. Similarly too, the incorporation of items of vocabulary which would seem more at home in the confines of *Carotid Cornucopius*, 'postposuit' or 'Boomb', lend an incongruous tone of levity rather than enhancing the deeply ironic tone aimed for, they are ill at



ease too when juxtaposed with the more familiar lyrical level forming the core of the poem.

The poems making up the fourth sub-section of *Figs and Thistles*, 'Three Texts on Perpetual Oppostion' and 'Deviation Tactics' are developed directly from such socio-political concerns, but reach out to broader regions concerning the poet and his role in contemporary society.

'Three Texts on Perpetual Opposition' (with due acknowledgement to MacDiarmid) is an update of Goodsir Smith's personal manifesto, deriving as much from his early faith in the worth of the outlan bard as from MacDiarmid's position, which ultimately is in harmony anyway.<sup>6</sup> The poem is not a complex one, but relies a good deal on direct statement, although once more shifts in tone add a rich texture to the work. The first 'text' for instance provides clear testimony to Goodsir Smith's disenchantment with political credos, simultaneously, to his faith in the outsider or outlaw spirit:

The guid conceit o rebellie men  
is in their faith alane  
No in the richt o the cause ava  
For yon aye ends the same

Tyrants up and beggars down  
As you and I weill ken.

(F.T. p. 27)

The tonal fusion, even in this opening stanza, of faith in the human spirit with political pessimism is symptomatic of the poem's overall texture. The central tenet, for that is largely what we are dealing with here, is that the poet's 'weird is aye to be the thorn / In the flesh o the bodie politic' (F.T. p. 28). The poem also pursues a defence of perpetual opposition as a stance, mainly, it is the thorniest place to be, again, the poet's place:

This, they tell, is a bairnlike stance  
And unco irresponsible  
But gied the premiss as it stands  
The logic's irreducible.  
Sen freedom for the bardic mynd  
Is indispensable

Some daft philosophie o this kinkynd  
Is quintessential.

(F.T. p. 28)

As we have seen, there are always many levels to Goodsir Smith's work and on one, in this case, he could be accused, at once, of negativism and romanticism in his acceptance, indeed reverence, of the poet's 'alienation' from society. Equally in his apparent unwillingness to contemplate ways in which that situation could be changed, a change he seems to regard as undesirable. The notion of the outlan as guardian of truth and energy can seem too much of a romantic posture, as in some of the earlier poetry. Nonetheless it should be said that 'alienation' is not a term Goodsir Smith would have embraced, at the same time while he *does* see the poet as maybe two steps to the side, usually to the left, his consistent commitment to egalitarianism, in conjunction with his self-effacing humour (apparent in the paradoxical levity in the lines above) provides a wholly valid escape clause from the 'elitist' accusations MacDiarmid, maliciously, left himself wide open to.

In the succeeding poem the basic idea of 'Three Texts on Perpetual Oppostion' is developed in a substantive manner, where, any negativism is attached to politics *per se*. Here Goodsir Smith elaborates on the intrinsic worth of *any* real individual and his potential efficacy; an efficacy for which the outlan bard serves embodiment, representing human tenacity and potential.

In 'Deviation Tactics' the 'hairt', as so often, serves to illustrate the fully human, a parallel to those qualities latent in the 'bard' figure. The poem is a fairly grim catalogue of deceits and deprivations inflicted man on man by the manipulators, dealers in soporifics, who will 'foil, or deviate, or use'. Deceit is propagated wholesale to satiate mean ego and ambition:

Our lugs wi contrar leid  
Are deavit nicht and day  
To pent the world black, pink, or reid  
And win some cuif ambition's pey-

(F.T. p. 30)

By now the 'mongers', in early Goodsir Smith synonymous with the bastions of Capitalism (echoing Pound's usage, without quite the same uncomfortable vitriol) appear in all colours and sizes, leaving a spiritual

desert, symbolically stripped bare of 'flesh and fruct', while 'among white banes the hairt is left'. While that survival, however vestigial, offers a gleam of hope, the poem ends on a dark note of warning:

But, the beam out, O Grief, be ware  
The slee ploys o policie  
(As 'Mick or Dev?' – 'Danton or Robespierre?')  
– Hairt's chaumers split by mongerie  
Can desecrate the martyr's gift  
Like a great tree by levin rift.

(F.T. p. 31)

The scenario is a bleak one, but it is that situation and asperity which draws out 'the rebel crew' once more, *necessitating* that perpetual opposition. A stark reminder of the poets' ultimate significance and the individual need to hold to veracity as a counterbalance to exploitation and dislocation in all its forms. This poem is the apex of the book's first movement, embodying in itself diverse oppositions common to the book in its entirety and encapsulating Goodsir Smith's faith in the variegated themes and subjects dealt with in preceding poems which, in turn, can be seen as representative of faith in the potential inner diversity of each individual and the infinity of variety in man as a species; eclecticism covers all the bases.

This opening section then encapsulates many of the ideas, areas, and techniques employed by Goodsir Smith, not only throughout the 1950s, but from the outset. In this book though, finding their most lucid, controlled embodiment, while, at the same time, deploying intriguing supplementary symptoms of the other areas the 50s drew Goodsir Smith towards. Meanwhile, the refinement of language, the manipulation of tone, diction, perspective and subject, marks a culmination, a drawing together, of the wide parameters concerning Goodsir Smith. A panorama further expanded and enlivened as we move on to the second section of the book.

## 2

If then the first section of *Figs and Thistles* is a potent miasma of diverse inclinations, interwoven in cumulative sequence, the second section of the book is, if intriguingly different, an equally strange hybrid, drawing

in components muted in the first section, so in turn complementing and expanding the overall work.

This is not immediately apparent, since the second section opens on a further series of what are ostensibly love poems. If we look a little closer though it becomes evident that here too Goodsir Smith is moving into fresh territory. The poems here differ from previous love poems most notably in that there is a more anguished and precise capturing of psychological disruption and the desperate desire for peace of mind:

Mither o the winds, come here to sleep!  
 Lown the cavaburd outby, and syne  
 Breathe saft as fedders round this heid  
 Whar owre monie voices speak.

(F.T. p. 41)

Love here is present only by implication, the poem is concerned with consequences and aftermath. The attempt to 'flee the Eumenides' (F.T. p. 41) suggests a love affair as root to this internal clamour, but the reference is double-edged as the Eumenides (represented traditionally as 'fearful winged maidens', *Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary* p. 215), are used as internalised images congruent with psychological cacophony.

As a parallel, the short poem 'The Coming of Spring' involves a scene of inner turmoil of almost riotous proportions:

The brattle o stanes that heralds avalanche  
 As souchan trees wind-whisper the breiran storm  
 Sae felt I in the bluid a fluther o wings  
 The drum and pipe o Pan and his ramstougerous rout  
 I heard the far fell cry o Aphrodite's horn  
 And snuff't the rank bouquet o luve's approach.

(F.T. p. 40)

The violence inherent in every aspect of these lines, from harsh vowel sounds exemplified particularly in 'ramstougerous rout', the turbulence of storm and avalanche, on to the invocation of Pan, are intimations of the darker subjective regions explored in these poems. Building on such intimations of inner violence there are various linked strands, in particular a pervasive preoccupation with transience and the tentativeness of human relationships and with mortality, the latter an omnipresent

if muffled parallel in all of the poems here and echoed in one way or another in much of Goodsir Smith's earlier works.

These elements are conjoined in 'A Tink in Reekie' where the poem's surface veneer deals with the 'narrator's' random pick-up of a 'tinkler lass' in a bar and subsequent departure with her. The veneer is a thin one and even in the first stanza the inclement elements, the ice and snow, suggest a stepping off point into uncharted and potentially damaging regions:

My lass and I in the lamplicht street-  
A smirr o snaw on the wind  
And she smiled as the ice took her  
Lauchan up in my face a tinkler lass  
As we left the randie howff  
Bleezan ahint us.

(F.T. p. 42)

The contrast of the bleak streets with the life and blaze of the abandoned bar is central, while deeper resonances are implicit and to some degree encapsulated in that third line, 'And she smiled as the ice took her'. The paradox of love and contact, knowing ultimately only death and decay, separation and hurt await, we still manage to laugh in the face of that recognition, however long the shadow. So here, the clearly transient nature of the newly formed relationship, not to mention the fundamental transience of the 'tinkler lass', transience personified, recalling the earlier, if pointedly negative, meth-drinker), still comes equipped with inbuilt barbs. This is all, and all that *can* be, given the paradox reaches to every level of our existence. 'Doomed we were and kent the haill o't' (F.T. p. 42).

It is the recognition of such paradox which leads to the violent inner turbulence expressed here. Yet this is part of a series of superimpositions in constant flux, the cycles and the palimpsest in a perpetually unstable state, for beside the darker moments of inner pain and chaos, there are epiphanous moments, as in the laugh of the 'tinkler lass'. This idea is pursued in 'Judge Nocht', a poem hammering home the realities of physical transience:

When I am deid and gane  
And the blind worms' fodder  
There's no muckle I'd fain

Hae mynd o suner  
 Frae this world o men  
 As her sidden lauchter  
 Teeman free like bird-sang  
 -Ay, and her rapt dolour  
 Dowie, itherwhar  
 As a thochtless wean's.

(F.T. p. 46)

The last lines make the paradox explicit, for the more sorrowful moments too are intrinsic to our being. Essential components inescapable as mortality and, retrospectively, to be savoured as testimony to the range and diversity of all experience and sensation, rose and thorn, thorn and rose.

This is also a feature of the more conventional love poem, 'We Sall Never Want' where, '-Luve's queerest alchemie' is dealt with in direct terms, eschewing the subjective delvings which pervade this section, the latter however providing a contextual backdrop to the more directly personal expression here:

Och, we sall never want, witch, you and I,  
 The gowd that is hairt's richest tresorie-  
 Come aa the hazards that on Eros tend  
 We hae a gowden hoard put bye  
 -A million in memorie.

(F.T. p. 49)

The lyrics here are virtually Goodsir Smith's final statement in this mode, there are to be no more lyrics of the intensity of those collected here, few lyrics at all in fact. These poems compress the full span of Goodsir Smith's perceptions of the mass of paradox, the disturbing and distorting vagaries in the midst of which we must function. After *Figs and Thistles* Goodsir Smith approaches his themes from diverse angles, already at this stage, in modes outwith poetry. As previously noted the publication of *Figs and Thistles* coincides with works such as *The Wallace* and *The Vision of the Prodigal Son*.

It is tempting to speculate on possible circumstances accounting for the effective end of the flow of lyrics Goodsir Smith sustained for nearly twenty years. Certainly his increasing preoccupation with work for radio and television as well as with drama indicates a clear pointer. Similarly,

Norman MacCaig has stated that one of the factors accounting for the compression, complexity and length of *Under The Eildon Tree* stemmed from Goodsir Smith's frustration and dissatisfaction with his preceding work in shorter forms, 'The Wanderer' too suggests an earlier inclination to move on to a broader canvas.<sup>7</sup>

So, certainly by 1947-8 there are intimations of Goodsir Smith shying away from lyrics and into more elaborate structures, *Carotid* and *Colickie Meg* in turn mirroring that same inclination. Such divergences are also indicated in the two long poems making up the concluding section of *Figs and Thistles*, 'The Twal' and 'The Gangrel Rymour and the Pairdon of Sanct Anne'. A further illustration of Goodsir Smith's diversity throughout the 50s finding common ground in *Figs and Thistles*.

### 3

Several features of these poems are significant in indicating the nature of Goodsir Smith's developments and a consideration of how these poems work will illustrate several features not apparent in the poems already discussed, as well as preparing the ground for a discussion of Goodsir Smith's later work in longer forms of which these are in certain respects prototypical.

'The Twal', derived from the work of Alexander Blok, is set in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917. More dense and oblique, modes of objective approach are employed here, as in the opening stanzas where precarious weather conditions, people battered by winds, slithering on ice, echo the international and internal (as regards both nation and individual) instability, confusion and threat:

Frae the white grund  
The yowden-drift  
Blaws in lacy wreithes,  
Under the snaw is ice-  
Slidder and glaizie . . . .  
Aabodie skites around  
And down they faa  
Puir craturs aa!

(F.T. p. 55)

Although the poem is multi-layered the principal approach is much more direct, effectively the launch of a scathing attack on hypocrisy



of all denominations; encompassing the social, sexual, moral, political, national and spiritual. This more direct approach in itself is a characteristic of Goodsir Smith's work post 1960 and is already a distinctive feature in *The Wallace*. On a related plane, 'The Twal' is also concerned with the too pervasive contempt for human life and human values, the vulnerability of man to manifold corruptions and the paradoxical survival even in lost causes and apocalyptic scenarios, of the shreds of human emotion and veracity. Here once more then, we find Goodsir Smith's concern with the 'wandering', and too often absent, spirit of truth and freedom, central to so much of his work.

The various themes are dealt with in different ways, notably through the use of characterisation and the incorporation of stray, fragmentary voices and dialogue. Again here we can see features of Goodsir Smith's work in other areas filtering through, almost cross-fertilising, with the approach employed here echoing the use of *dramatis personae* in *Under The Eildon Tree*, the ongoing concern with drama, the often fragmented dialogues and monologues of *Carotid Cornucopius*.

The landscapes here are heavily populated and Goodsir Smith uses their situations, activities and fragments of reported speech to ironic effect. An 'auld wife' unable to decide the significance of 'a muckle hingan clout' proclaiming 'ALL POUER TIL THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLIE!' (F.T. p. 55), can see the swathes of cloth only in utilitarian terms:

It'd dae for leggins for the weans,  
Maist aa o them's wantan claes . . . .

(F.T. p. 55)

The scene opens like a fan as characters are tagged, the 'bourgeois at the corner' (F.T. p. 56), 'a long-gounied fellie' (F.T. p. 56), 'a leddie wi an Astrakhan coat' (F.T. p. 56); chances for scathing observations are taken up in passing, as with the 'Brither meenister':

Are ye myndan the guid auld times  
When ye strode wi stuck-out bellie  
And the Cross upo' your weym  
Glentit on aa men? . . .

(F.T. p. 56)

Goodsir Smith's own narrative voice in the poem is several times removed from the one with which we are more familiar. This is due

in part to the 'translation' element, for Blok is in here too faithfully rendered, but the distancing is studied and tonally eclectic. The overt attack on the minister above for instance contrasts with observations on another passing figure:

But wha's this? Wi the busss o hair,  
Girnan under his braith:  
    Traitors ! he says,  
    Russia's betrayit!  
– He'll be a scryvor,  
A pennie-a-liner . . .

(F.T. p. 56)

These lines recall the double-debunking ironies of the Meth-Drinker poem, the overt is intertwined with the circumnavigatous, the former elucidates the intent of the latter so that the most cutting observations are, in terms of irony, between lines. Similarly, amid the narrative voice are fragments of dialogue, 'Ay, my dear, and we grat and grat' (F.T. p. 56), 'Hey, ye tink! / Come here – / I'll no eat ye . . . !' (F.T. p. 57), the effect is stroboscopic, characters come and go, busy scenes, landscape in motion, cacophony of voices and images all with thinly (or not so) veiled intent. The fragments build up a complex picture wherein even the briefest appearance is channelled for effect. Part one of the poem rounds back on the opening landscape and concludes with direct annunciation of its implications conjoined to a warning:

The lift is mirk, mirk.

Hate, dowie hate  
Teems in the breist . . .  
Mirkie hate, haille hate . . .

*Brither!*  
*Tak tent!*

(F.T. p. 57)

Part two of the poem relocates on that storm swept landscape and focuses on 'the twal' of the poem's title, twelve soldiers on the march, the poem homes in on their discussions. The fragments of conversation

supplied are cumulatively illuminating. 'The Twal' are Communist revolutionaries discussing an (ex) friend who has gone with the Czarist forces, 'He was aince ane o us-he's a sodjer nou' (F.T. p. 58). He is then discussed enviously as 'Johnnie's got lashings . . . I'm tellan You!' (F.T. p. 58), only to be subsequently dismissed as 'bystart plutocrate' (F.T. p. 58). Such ironies proliferate, the chant of the day is, 'Nae Kirk for me!' and 'Freedom! Freedom! Libertie!' (F.T. p. 58), swiftly followed with the dismissal of 'Kate', apparently utilising her freedom and liberty (or being exploited), in terms reeking of Christian 'morality', or hypocrisy, depending on your viewpoint:

Kittie's gey chief wi Johnnie the nou!  
And what wad her business be – the cou!

(F.T. p. 58)

The concluding lines of this section drive these points home, particularly effective in this are the lines:

Watch your step, my traistie fiere!  
The enemy sleeps gey lichtlie here

(F.T. p. 58)

The 'enemy' is manifest in the dialogue of the revolutionaries themselves, not in the proximity of Czarist insomniacs. Their intolerance and hypocrisy is crowned as the cheer goes up for 'Hailie Russia' with 'Nae Kirk for me!' (F.T. p. 59), hard on its heels. The thoughtless mouthing of dogma and platitudes, the mindless following ('They suld hae Braid Arrows on their backs', F.T. p. 58), is always 'the enemy'. These lines present a vivid encapsulation of the consequences of the abandonment or loss of self-determination symbolised from the early days in the likes of Peter Morrison. There is an underlying didacticism in work such as 'The Twal', never hectoring but always implicit and centred on the existential vein which pervades. If we were to look for some kind of summation of 'the message' attendant to the moral core of such work, MacDiarmid's lines from *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* come as close as any:

And let the lesson be – to be yersel's,  
Ye needna fash gin it's to be ocht else.  
To be yersel's – and to mak that worth bein',  
Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en.<sup>8</sup>

'The Twal' illustrates the consequences of failure to 'mak that worth bein', just as succinctly as Wallace in Goodsir Smith's play, or Peter Morrison before him, illustrate the existentially positive capacities of the free thinking individual: countering the negative forces of a hostile and implicitly corrupt social or political environment.

That negativity and its corrupt and corrupting influence are drawn out more bluntly in part three of the poem, where there is a notable acceleration as voices weave in and out and the sections themselves are compacted, becoming more abrupt. Here hypocrisies and mindlessness are compounded as three short stanzas move from a celebration of 'A-servan wi the Reid Guaird' (F.T. p. 59), to the facile, 'But life is fun! / Wi a raggit greatcoat / And an Austrian gun!' (F.T. p. 59). That frivolousness is contrasted with 'Throu aa the world a gleid o bluid-' (F.T. p. 59), the latent uncertainties proliferate, yet through that depravity and decay is still expected 'the blessing o' the Lord upon us!' (F.T. p. 59). All of which hardly leaves veracity and consistency a leg to stand on, as protracted ironies accumulate the portrayal of 'man' seems more and more bleak and hopeless.

In part four of the poem specific focus shifts to Kittie and Johnnie, passing through town in a droshkie. Johnnie smug, 'twirlan his mustachiauw' (F.T. p. 59). Background voices again filter through, a chorus commenting on their passage:

Ech, what a braw lad is our John!  
Ech, what a gift o' the gab has John!  
See nou, she's in his airms – the hure!  
He's talkan her round . . . and round . . .  
and owre . . .

(F.T. p. 60)

Whichever 'side' personae may be affiliated with, the same double-standards, or absence of standards, pervade. This is emphasised in part five of the poem, part four flashes by like the carriage itself, a link shot as five zooms in to focus more closely on Johnnie and Kittie. This section deals primarily with Johnnie's attitude to the girl, which is far from loving tender care, merely opportunist exploitation; the revolution has spun the world around, for Kittie is more used to officers, if Johnnie is to be believed:

Ye flichterit round in slips o lace –

Flichter round, then, aa ye wiss!  
 Wi officers set a bonnie pace –

(F.T. p. 60)

In the new situation her aim is lower:

Ye were braw in dou-gray gaiters, then,  
 And staw'd your gob wi Mignon chocs;  
 Ye'd officers for your joes, then,  
 But nou ye've juist the jocks!

(F.T. p. 61)

The central point here is the way in which power-play derails *both* Johnnie and Kittie, they are pawns of the broader game which has tainted them, as here, they play the same games with one another, feeling, even consideration, falls by the wayside. Each is out for personal gain while the bitterness and malice is scarcely concealed.

The poem is never static and moves relentlessly to confrontation as, in part six, Johnnie and Kittie come face to face with 'the twal', who confront the droshkie and open fire. Johnnie escapes fast enough with the driver, but Kittie is killed in the hail of bullets. In the wake of these events the attitude of these liberators betrays total contempt for life:

But whar's my Kittie? – Deid! She's deid!  
 Stairk wi a bullet throu her heid!  
 Weill, Kit, are ye brawlie nou? – Nae word . . .  
 Ligg there i' the snaw, then! Feed the birds! . . .

(F.T. p. 61)

And against this bloody backdrop is set once more the eery refrain:

Watch your step, my traistie fiere!  
 The enemy sleeps gey lichtlie here!

(F.T. p. 61)

Part seven of the poem stays with 'the twal' as they march on in the wake of the slaughter. The scene is set and we are drawn into their discourse on the death of Kittie. Peter, a former lover, feels compassion in some degree and the shift in stylistic levels provides a stark counterpoint to Johnnie's earlier remarks on Kittie:

Och, guid fieres o mine,  
I loed the queyne . . .  
Nichts wi her I mynd  
Mirkie and ree wi wine –  
And, for the bricht defyant  
Lowe in her een,  
And for yon purple birth-scaur  
On her richt shouther,  
For thae, like a fule, I shot her,  
Ay, in my wuddreme murtherit her . . .

(F.T. p. 62)

The momentary flash of sincerity and self-awareness coupled to self-pity, is immediately demeaned by the jeering of Peter's comrades, 'Are ye a lassie, Pate, or a man?' (F.T. p. 62). Their response to a grisly death as well as to sincerely expressed emotion, is that of the schoolyard, their callousness, carelessness and switch of mood:

And Peter slaws  
His borneheid step,  
Lifts his heid  
And sune cheers up . . .

(F.T. p. 63)

– is childish in its total lack of morality while Peter's impressionability and emotional shallowness illustrates that blind, unthinking compliance tarnishes on every level. The preceding ugliness is shrugged off and trivialised:

*Hey, jig a jig, O jig for me!*  
*Whit's the crime in a wee bit spree?*

(F.T. p. 63)

As 'the twal' move on their way, however, the lack of conviction among them surfaces and part eight deals with the confusions evident in the almost schizoid scenes preceding. Once more fragments of voice are incorporated, 'Och, we's wearie-wae! / Dowie and dreich! / Bored til daith!' (F.T. p. 63). These inclinations are submerged in pseudo-bravado, in sexual boasting and celebration of violence, 'And

flash my shiv / I'll flash it tae hell!' (F.T. p. 64). The contrasts in dialogue too are continually telling, from 'Flee awa, bourgeois, like wee speugs! / Or I'se soup your bluid' (F.T. p. 64) to 'Grant peace til Thy servant's saul, O Lord! / Christ, but I'm bored!' (F.T. p. 64), illustrates individual confusion, ignorance and absence of self-awareness, flaws in 'the revolution', derived themselves from 'the values' of one system or another, dichotomies personified.

A calmness comes in part nine, a kind of hiatus, revolutionary and bourgeois alike are shown as adrift in a desolate scenario. This is a momentary pause for, from this section onward, the pace of the poem is relentlessly accelerated. Part ten returns to the opening objective imagery, expanded by the backgrounds through which we have been led, the portrayal of 'the twal' here is studiously absurd recalling pantomimes and blind mice, blind man's bluff:

The cavaburd aye rages snell.  
     Aye the wind! Aye the snaw!  
 Tane canna see the tither ava  
     Fowr steps awa!

(F.T. p. 64)

The implications, now much more overt, is supplemented by further snatches of dialogue, increasingly callous, increasingly confused and vindictive, internecine:

Ye're an ignorant gett! Is there na  
 Reid bluid on your hands, aye weet,  
 For luv o your Kate?

(F.T. p. 65)

Part eleven of 'The Twal' follows on the march, blinkers down with a vengeance as the scenario becomes more absurd, more frenzied, here 'the cavaburd blows aye in their een' (F.T. p. 66) and the pantomime element is accentuated. 'The Twal' are in a maze, looking for ghosts to shout at, and, they have no vision in the first place:

Their steel rifles at the readie  
 For the enemie unseen  
 In the tuim and mirkie closes

(F.T. p. 65)



The twelfth and final section of the poem compounds the chaotic, confused scenario:

Wha's yonder, wi the Reid Flag? There!  
Can ye see the man? It's mirk as hell!  
Wha's yonder, rinnan by the houses?  
In the shadaws dernan his sel?

(F.T. p. 67)

The last lines of the poem decontextualise and broaden the scenario, moving outwith the 1917 perspective. This is a ghost march, the negative force that pervades our world, omnipresent yet intangible, 'Seen by nane i' the snawblind nicht' (F.T. p. 67). Finally the last line 'Aye at their heid there mairches – Jesus.' (F.T. p. 67) rounds off the ironic scenario with an overt tying off of the religious symbolism implicit in 'the twal'.

Overall, no system emerges untainted, Christian or Communist, negativism and manipulation are attacked on every level while the poem's central credo and objective is to emphasise and illustrate the importance, the need to treasure and strive to develop integral human values and individual spirit. Blind followers, at whichever level of the strata, president or peasant, will never get out of the storm. The poem is an impressive and forceful encapsulation of much that characterises Goodsir Smith's work in its entirety. From his position in socio-political terms, to the moral and existential undercurrents, traceable as a web throughout Goodsir Smith's development. Here too there is a convincing fusion of the poet and the dramatist, with the quasi-dramatic structuring and incorporation of reported speech facilitating the poem's immediacy: an immediacy lent further force by Goodsir Smith's frequent and cutting use of heavy irony.

4

These too are characteristics apparent in the second of the concluding long poems, 'The Gangrel Rymour and the Pairdon of Sanct Anne', a translation, or derivation, from Corbière's 'La Rapsode Foraine et le Pardon de Sainte-Anne' (1873), functioning here as a direct counterpoint and extension, from an obversely different viewpoint, of the theme of hypocrisy dealt with in 'The Twal'. While 'The Twal' draws on the hypocrisy of the would-be atheist revolutionaries, 'The Gangrel Rymour'

derives from that same hypocrisy manifest in the would-be Christian 'elect'. Each in their turn exemplifying a fundamental baseness, self-interest, self-delusion and susceptibility to manipulation.

The poem is dedicated to Goodsir Smith's close friend Norman MacCaig, appropriately so given MacCaig's own views on religion, clearly much in tune with Goodsir Smith's. MacCaig sums up his position succinctly in an interview published in *Cencrastus*

RJR As an ex-teacher and headmaster, what do you think of religious education in schools?

NM I'm against it, very strongly against it. If there should be – if there *has* to be, it should be comparative religion. They should be told roughly – I mean top forms in a school – not just the Christian rubbish, but the Buddhistic rubbish and the Zen rubbish and the Islam rubbish, so that they could pick which sort of rubbish they propose to corrupt themselves with.<sup>9</sup>

If Goodsir Smith himself was never quite so explicit in stating his point of view, that it is much akin is evident in the satire apparent in this poem, on an overt level, from the outset. Four lines into the poem and Goodsir Smith is already dismantling Saint Anne's much vaunted spiritual veracity, belied with assertions of intrinsic decay and mendacity:

O' the Guidwife Sanct Anne,  
Guid-Auntie til the bairnie Jesus,  
in the rotten wuid o her soutane  
Rich, mair rich nor Croesus.

(F.T. p. 71)

The setting of 'the Pairdon', as the people flock in, is itself shown as blighted, 'The cowit gerss is routh wi lice' (F.T. p. 71), while central polarities are ironically contrasted as '– Seraphic choir and drucken sang -' (F.T. p. 71). This opening section is followed by an address to Saint Anne, rendered wholly ironic and tonally ambiguous by the context established in the introductory material. Much of the scepticism is in some degree veiled, but when it does fully surface the edges are sharp and unequivocal 'Aneath the gowd o her robe she derns / Luve in the

likeness o Breton francs!' (F.T. p. 72). It is not only the lady herself who is concerned with worldly goods, as the address closes it becomes clear that faith does not run too deep and that the 'faithful' too are cash conscious:

*- Til a towmond! - Here's your candle:  
Twa pund it set me!  
Respecks til my Leddie the Virgin,  
No forgettan the trinite.*

(F.T. p. 75)

The people at least are more direct in expressing their priorities. As in 'The Twal', Goodsir Smith's shifts in voice, tone and setting veer continually, but the transitions are accomplished smoothly, it is only when we delve beneath the carefully sustained surface gloss that incongruities become evident. Linguistic shifts are particularly important in this respect. Initially passages dealing with Saint Anne and her followers are set in italics and are detectably more polysyllabic and Latinate, while the poet's commentary and sections dealing with 'the people' are set in normal type and employ a more abrasive and distinct Scots vocabulary: as the faithful queue for blessing, for instance:

*Houlan, a rachitic  
Shaks a baneless stump,  
Joustlan an epileptic  
That works in a sump.*

(F.T. p. 75)

Such passages are often employed to convey overt statements of cynicism or blatant irony, so maintaining an ironic sub-stratum in less obvious passages; yet even here the Latin 'epileptic' and Greek 'rachitic' are woven into the distinctly Scots qualities of the verse. As the poem develops, with such parameters established, they are systematically broken down in ways which enable Goodsir Smith, in some of the more scathing passages, to invert the Latinate vocabulary, so achieving ironic linguistic effects complementing the semantic:

*Are they no divine on their hurdles?  
Haloes round aureoles o vermeelon,  
Thir proprietors o scurls,*

In the sun the live cornelians! . . .

(F.T. p. 75)

The blend of French, Latin and Scots creates virtually a form of shrouded macaronics which in turn builds up a density in the texture of the poem paralleling the masked ironies which filter up through the more direct statements. In the wake of the rachitic and epileptic, an entire parade of misfits, damaged and diseased unravels in a chain:

There, beilins grow on the runt o a man,  
Here, mistle on the runt o a tree,  
Here, a lassie and her mither  
Dansan Sanct Vitus's jiggerie.

(F.T. p. 76)

The cumulative effect recalls dark and ominous scenes from Bruegel, an ugliness imbued with the underlying resonance of the falsehoods which precipitate the display. This is emphasised in illustration of the fruits garnered by the faithful:

Efter vespers, amang the lave  
Sprent wi hailie water, a cadaver  
Thrives, livan by leprosie  
– Memento o some crusader . . .

(F.T. p. 76)

Such backdrops of death and decay function in the same way as the harsh climate of 'The Twal', reflecting the inner condition of the participants. Here too, followed and followers alike exist in that same meaningless limbo:

And aa thae that the Kings o France  
Made haill wi a finger's pressure . . .  
– But France has nae mair kings,  
And their God hauds back his pleasure.

(F.T. p. 76)

As the poem moves towards its conclusion guises are allowed to slip away and attacks become direct, leaving no doubt as to their ironic or sarcastic intent:

– We – we maun wheesht! *They* are sauntit:  
it is the wyte o Adam's sin,  
By the finger o the Abune they're brandit:  
Blessit be the hand o the Abune!

Scapegaets o the muckle riff-raff  
Here ablow loddenit wi forfauts,  
On them God outbocks his wrath! . . .  
– The minister o Sanct Anne is fat.

(F.T. p. 77-78)

Overt content aside, typeface and punctuation, hyphenation, exclamation marks, rows of stops etc., are used extensively to manipulate tone here, as throughout, constituting a significant factor in indicating Goodsir Smith's concern with the aural qualities of the verse as opposed to the purely textual. This is a long way from the minimalist tactics employed at the beginning of the 1950s and is concomitant once more to his increasing interest in work for broadcast and in dramatic forms.

Although, again like 'The Twal', the overall view is a bleak one, 'The Gangrel Rymour' concludes more positively and optimistically. Hope is manifest in the long delayed appearance of the Rymour himself, an archetypal Goodsir Smith outlan:

. . . .a gangrel rymour  
That gies the fowk, for a farden,  
*The Ballant o the Vagabone Yid,*  
*Abelard, or The Magdalen.*

(F.T. p. 78)

It is the ballad of the Rymour that finally cuts like light across the Bruegel scenario:

. . . ae braithless note,  
An echo trummilan on the wind,  
Comes to brash the drizzenan drune  
O' this stravaigan limbo-grund.

(F.T. p. 78)

These lines provide the central contrast, the vagabond offers more with his rhyme and song than the elect who would sneer at him as damned,

whose offer of succour consists of a taste of holy water, 'Whar the sca'd-heid Jobs hae lauvit / Their smittle naukitness' (F.T. p. 75). The Rymour is also a cheaper investment, a farthing for his song as opposed to two pounds for a candle. With the coming of the Rymour the poem comes to its conclusion with a final alleviation of misery, portrayed in dreary, decadent terms:

A woman, it looks; wae's me! – her clouts  
 Hing frae her, wi twine upkiltit:  
 Her black tooth hauds a pipe, gane out . . .  
 – Life's aye some consolation intil't

(F.T. p. 79)

This final section moves outwith the gathering of disparate personae and is set in 'the poet's' own voice (albeit a further disguise), commenting on the scene and addressing the Rymour, makar to makar; in conclusion the Bard suggests the Rymour offers this embodiment of misery, ' . . . a bit baccy, for a smoke!' (F.T. p. 79), a last assertion, after wading through preceding corruption and decay, of the superior worth of basic unmotivated generosity, a last representation of the truly human essence and spirit:

Ye'll see her runklie face runkle  
 Wi a smile, as in a tree;  
 And her sca'd hand will mak  
 A true sign o the Corse for ye.

(F.T. p. 79)

*Figs and Thistles* is very much the culmination of the decade in more ways than simply as regards its date of publication. It constitutes an overview of all his creative work in the 1950s encapsulating the overall movement from minimalist lyrics through to the return of the expansiveness indicated in the longer poems discussed above, equally it carries the fragments of the postmodern debunking irony and parody so prevalent in some of the seminal works. The greater expansiveness indicated here embraces both subject matter and stylistic techniques such as the increasingly complex modes of juxtaposition, analogy and contrast. The end of this decade also marks the re-integration of punctuation, almost phased out in the early 50s, indeed, on a massive scale as in 'The Gangrel Rymour', which could even be described as over-punctuated, a far cry

from the days of *The Aipple and the Hazel* or *Cokkils*. This correlates to Goodsir Smith's returned concern with modes of textual representation most evident in the two poems concluding *Figs and Thistles*, he has not employed such approaches on this scale since *Under the Eildon Tree* in 1948. Most significant of such various developments is Goodsir Smith's extensive use of dialogue, incursive voices and renewed concern with the manipulation of personae, distinctive in 'The Twal'.

In its diversity of style and technique, in its range of themes and concerns, *Figs and Thistles* stands with *Under The Eildon Tree* as one of Goodsir Smith's finest achievements. A rich and elaborately patterned work, impressive in its technical precision and in many ways a microcosmic gathering of Goodsir Smith's diverse capabilities, with multiple layers and strands reaching out to encompass the broad sweep of Goodsir Smith's work as a whole.

All of these factors point to Goodsir Smith's long narrative poems designed for broadcast and correlate to his work as a dramatist, some of which, discussed earlier, already extant by 1959. To conclude then, in Chapter Eight, I will move on to take a look at Goodsir Smith's late and last works as a stepping stone towards an over all assessment of the nature of Goodsir Smith's achievement, some of the unique aspects of his work, along with some estimate of the range and quality of that work. Finally too, to consider the apparent critical neglect of Goodsir Smith's contribution to twentieth century Scottish poetry and to look at some of the virtually unexplored avenues integral to his works which may open up potentialities for new Scottish writers on the edge of the twenty-first century.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THIS RORTIE WRETCHED CITY<sup>1</sup>

'Embrow toun is me and me is it – d'ye see?'  
(K.K.L. p. 24)

#### 1

After 1960, with *Figs and Thistles* and *The Wallace* under his belt, in what turned out to be the last fifteen years of his life, Goodsir Smith was less productive in terms of poetry than in the almost vagabond years spanning 1940 to 1960. Apart from any other consideration making a living was never an easy business. Although Goodsir Smith had received an 'allowance' from his father, his friend the poet Stanley Roger Green recalls that this amounted to something in the region of £2.00 a week.<sup>2</sup> That meant a bit more then than it does today, but not that much. This meant that from time to time Goodsir Smith turned his hand to other activities outwith his more immediately creative work, which remains for the majority of writers a dubious source of income.

Norman MacCaig remembers tales of one notorious, and brief, stint when Goodsir Smith took on a teaching job. MacCaig regarded Goodsir Smith as virtually unemployable, even apart from the chronic asthma which continually plagued him. As a teacher, one of the central problems was that Goodsir Smith had absolutely no sense of discipline in the classroom, not that *he* would have seen this as a problem. This though resulted in tactics such as 'putting up a packet of fags' for the longest essay – regardless of merit. It was also allegedly not unknown for Goodsir Smith to return from lunch with a substantial percentage of the sixth year pupils just a bit the worse for drink. His teaching career was not prolonged.<sup>3</sup>

Such tales proliferate and as memories grow more hazy, accompanied by Goodsir Smith's own capacity to embroider and help along anything of the 'boozy bard' persona he found amusing, it is hard to establish how many aspects of tales such as these are apocryphal. Whatever the truth though, you usually come away feeling that they *should* be true.

Still, in the early 1960s Goodsir Smith, for a time, landed a slightly more appropriate role as 'art critic' for *The Scotsman*, probably through his friend the artist Denis Peploe. However, although painting remained

one of Goodsir Smith's major enthusiasms (he would blether about painting rather than poetry any night) characteristically, he did not take the job too seriously: certainly not as seriously as *The Scotsman* may have wished. A number of artists too were less than enamoured, feeling that, as a poet, he was not qualified for the job.<sup>4</sup>

Norman MacCaig has first hand experience, to move beyond the potentially apocryphal, of Goodsir Smith's approach, having tagged along to an exhibition to be reviewed. On arrival Goodsir Smith promptly disappeared – only to make a breathless return, while MacCaig was still dwelling over the first handful of paintings, saying, 'Right that's that, it's done'. MacCaig was then, having responded, 'What? Where's your bicycle?' treated to a synopsis of the reviewer's approach. This consisted of a rapid tour of the gallery, noting, 'I could do that, I could do that, they must be rubbish'; when these were written off he would return briefly to the ones he *couldn't* do, and they were the review.

Aside from this though, the 1960's saw Goodsir Smith continuing to undertake occasional editorial work. 1962 for instance marked the publication of *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Festschrift*, which Goodsir Smith edited jointly with K. D. Duval. This was a seventieth birthday tribute to MacDiarmid and featured Goodsir Smith's own contribution, the essay 'MacDiarmid's Three Hymns to Lenin'. This was followed in 1965 by *Bannockburn* (subtitled 'the story of the battle and its place in Scotland's history') while the following year brought the publication of *A Choice of Burns' Poems and Songs*, Goodsir Smith's own selection to which he also provided the introduction.

Meanwhile though, as the books continued to appear, on the more strictly creative front, while all was not at a standstill, some of the work to appear after 1960 was very much of a 50s, or even earlier, vintage. This included the appearance of the revised and expanded version of *Carotid Cornucopius* in 1964, which, as we have seen, has its origins as far back, certainly, as 1947. There was also the publication of the long poem *Gowdspink in Reekie* in book form in 1974. Again though, while the poem concludes 'Quod S. G. S. makar, Embrou Toun 1974', this poem originally appeared in the *Saltire Review*, 2 (5) Autumn 1955, bearing the date of composition as 'Embrou Toun 1954'.

So far as Goodsir Smith's *bona fide* later work is concerned then, there are really only two books which at this late stage require attention. These are *Kynd Kittock's Land* (1965), which I will look at in some detail as by far the most significant, and more briefly, *Fifteen Poems and a Play* (1969). For a number of reasons *Fifteen Poems and a Play* is less satisfactory

than *Kynd Kittock's Land* and at this stage I will turn attention to some of the reasons why before moving on to a more detailed study of *Kynd Kittock's Land*

## 2

First of all, of the poems collected in *Fifteen Poems and a Play*, many have been carried over from earlier books and have been discussed earlier in this study. Of these for instance, there are 'Said Heraclitus' and 'There Is A Tide', both originally from *The Aipple and the Hazel*, 'The Reid Reid Rose', from *Cokkils* and 'The Kenless Strand' from *Omers*. In a similar vein there is the inclusion of 'The Kimmers o' Cougate' (here with music by Robin Orr) which was originally one of the songs included in both *Colickie Meg* and *Carotid Cornucopius*. These then all date from the 40s or early to mid 1950s but, so far as the later Goodsir Smith is concerned there is one long poem here which *does* draw attention, 'The Twa Brigs'.

Norman MacCaig has said that in his view had this later work not been commissioned it would never have been written and is well below the standards of his finest work.<sup>9</sup> While I cannot agree with regard to *Kynd Kittock's Land*, 'The Twa Brigs' is not a comfortably accomplished poem.

The work was commissioned by the B. B. C. to tie in with the opening of the Forth Road Bridge and was broadcast on the fourth of September 1964, read by Iain Cuthbertson. Although running to eight pages the poem has none of the dense texturing, complex juxtaposition and tonal range characteristic of Goodsir Smith at his best. From the outset there is an uncertainty of tone and objective explicitly acknowledged in the verse itself:

Hou *this* cam about I dinnae ken  
 Or gif I kent ae time I cannae mind:  
 But sae it did, a maist unco queerlike stint  
 (Shades o' the laureate!) to hymn a brig  
 Twa generations auld afore it's born –  
 The Forth Road Brig, it's truth!

(F. P. p. 51)

Lines such as these suggest that Goodsir Smith actually has no idea what he is going to write, what the direction of the poem should be, he is

simply feeling his way in. There is much more in a similarly explicit vein: 'Unwordy then, I grip my shoogly pen / And launch me til a hyne I dinnae ken. (F. P. p. 51). In the same way having been effectively saddled with the bridge as a central image he is unsure what to do with it so that the results can seem strained and ungainly:

This braw new brig that streetches owre the Frith  
Wi a lichtsome streetch,  
Twa bonny airms o' lassies jynin owre the water,  
Wi their feet in the water tae –  
Didnae Venus rise frae the waves, for luve's sake?  
This is the stint I've taen –  
Sae let it be.

(F. P. p. 51)

Here the central image is too contrived and although lines such as these feature Goodsir Smith's familiar tactics of self-effacement, defusion of any possibility of our taking either poem or subject matter seriously, the resigned tone which glimmers through in those last two lines suggests that Goodsir Smith cannot take the task ahead seriously himself, and, for all his disclaimers, the flat tone and texture of the poem as a whole cannot match the quasi postmodern jugglings and dislocations achieved by similar means in *Under The Eildon Tree*.

Having stated his own reservations on the nature of the exercise Goodsir Smith turns his attention to the matter in hand, writing the poem. However he choses to pursue old and familiar themes, but here, devoid of fire, the pyrotechnics and stylistic alacrity we have come to expect. Instead we are drawn up through pre-bridge history, incorporating Wallace, English oppression and political and bureaucratic hypocrisy. Again though there is none of the passion to be found in work such as *The Deevil's Waltz*, and, at worst, this poem lapses into cold didacticism in flat prose:

Twa bits o' gear to jyne as ane  
Is nonsense surely! Let us try it,  
Then, as humans. Let us grow and learn and jyne  
And cease the senseless competition that divides  
Man frae man across the birlin Earth.

(F. P. p. 57)

This may be sincere but it is devoid of poetry, its tone more akin to the most self-conscious extremes of *Skail Wind*. There is humour here too nonetheless, but even here there are problems, notably the odd incursions of Carotidian vocabulary, 'sorrycumstances' or 'semi-soppyversive', which here simply seem isolated and eccentric. As the poem is drawn to a close though Goodsir Smith still fails to find the poem's focus, as at last we reach the central subject, the bridge itself, he is unable to conjure any light in its portrayal:

There she swings and lowps  
 And looks at her auld brither  
 Like a wee slip o' lassie to her busty jo  
 As gin she said, as a lassie says,  
 'See me! See my braw new dress Johnie!

(F. P. p. 56)

Here again the images are weak and sit incongruously with the technological aspects of the ostensive theme. Elements such as these ensure that 'The Twa Brigs' never really gets off the ground and fails to cohere. This simply does not compete with the complex lyrics, or, with virtually all of his other works in longer poetic forms. As Goodsir Smith signs off 'To slocken the terrible drouth engindered' (F. P. p. 58) we may be forgiven for sensing he is glad to be finished. However at this stage in the study I will not dwell further on this flawed work, for the citations above do accurately represent the texture, style and nature of the work as a whole, I will, rather, turn attention to a much more significant work from Goodsir Smith's later years, *Kynd Kittock's Land*. A poem which, if sharing a similar genesis to 'The Twa Brigs', is superior in every way.

### 3

In accordance with a, by now, long standing tradition *Kynd Kittock's Land* was published by Callum MacDonald, in 1965. In common too with a number of the later poems this work was a commission, in this case from BBC television. The work was first broadcast in February 1964, produced by Finlay Macdonald, and was later repeated in November 1965. *Kynd Kittock's Land*, in what was becoming another tradition, was read by Ian Cuthbertson and was effectively illustrated by the still photography of Alan Daiches.

The poem is a projection from 'The Ballad of Kynd Kittok', often attributed to William Dunbar (1465–1530). In the original ballad 'Kynd Kittok' was a simple but hard living, hard drinking woman who 'deit of thirst'. Having made her precarious way to heaven she spends seven years there in which she 'livit a gude life'. She eventually grows weary though, for 'the ale of heaven was sour'. In the end she becomes the proprietor of an alehouse just outside heaven's gates:

Than to the alehouse again she ran, the pitcheris to  
pour,  
And to brew and bake,  
Friends I pray you hertfully,  
Gif ye be thirsty or dry,  
Drink with my guddame, as ye gae by,  
Anis fir my sake.<sup>6</sup>

Quite where 'Kynd Kittok's' earthly abode was, Dunbar does not make clear. For Goodsir Smith though, it had to be the 'rortie wretched city' of Edinburgh. The city itself pervades much of Goodsir Smith's mature work, from *Under The Eildon Tree* onwards. Sometimes simply as a background flavour or landscape, often as a character or companion, always recognisable if wildly mutated; more often as some kind of labyrinthine, timeless adventure playground. *Kynd Kittok's Land* though sees the city itself awarded its most central role, the poem as much an address to the city as to any more conventional notion of audience. On one level this is Goodsir Smith's guided tour of the city, up and down the centuries like Carotid before him, enumerating the pubs and dives – and bards long gone:

A queerlike canyon is the Canongate,  
That murmurs yet wi the names  
O' lang deid bards – alack,  
Auld Rabbie's Bar is gane  
But Honest Allan's there  
And the ghaist o' the Electric Shepherd  
(As they cry him)  
Still hauds up his boozie snoot for nourishment:  
Puir Fergusson's forgot, eheu! Eheu!

(K.K.L. pp. 13–14)



Much of Goodsir Smith's work catches something of the city's own strangely variegated character, its always twilit and twisting wynds, alleys and canyons, its gaunt overlooking edifices set against the only (and increasingly less) meticulous sprawl of the new town. Equally, its diverse spectrum of social strata, topographical absurdities and peculiarly amorphous identity. Edinburgh can sometimes seem to offer a template for Goodsir Smith's work, mirroring his own diverse inclinations, his love of paradox, of juxtaposition, his veering mood, tone and stance.

Aspects such as these are vividly illustrated in *Under The Eildon Tree* and in *Carotid Cornucopius* but they are even more central to *Kynd Kittock's Land*, and, while the poem differs in many ways from these precedents, it remains in itself a disconcertingly strange and accomplished work.

The poem's point of departure is through direct address, a veering monologue set as dramatic narrative, gradually incorporating fragments of dialogue and flashes of extravagant rhetoric. On the face of it then, a not too distant relative of *Under The Eildon Tree*, and in many ways just as elusive of definition, if far less distinctively unusual in its surface texture. The deceptive complexity of the poem, for the almost casual, throwaway surface tone is very much a veneer, lies rooted in the discursive syntactic layout of the poem, creating a carefully disguised parenthesis conjoined to what can seem almost schizophrenic shifts in tone, theme and style.

The poem is set in six sections, loosely linked though each is distinctive. The polarities and ironies of the city are singled out from the start while the discursive nature of style, theme and stance are equally quickly apparent. A closer look at the poem's opening section points to the central structural principles governing the work as a whole and can provide a clearer illustration of what Goodsir Smith is up to here.

No sooner is the central theme, the city, introduced: 'This rortie wretched city / Sair come doon frae its auld hiechts', than Goodsir Smith deviates over the next six lines to present a direct commentary on the city and its inhabitants:

– The hauf o't smug, complacent,  
Lost til all pride of race or spirit,  
The tither wild and rouch as ever  
In its secret hairt



But lost alsweill, the smeddum gane,  
The man o' independent mind has cap in hand the day.

(K.K.L. p. 7)

The diversion offers explicit socio-political commentary and it is, unusually, also equally explicitly pessimistic; moving from levity to bleakness through only a handful of lines. As so often in Goodsir Smith's work we find the outlaw or outsider to the fore, the 'man o' independent mind'. In this case however, there is little suggestion of the existential positivism normally attendant to such figures in preceding works. Similarly, while the 'wild and rouch' may still survive, it is stifled in the implicit spiritual impotence.

Goodsir Smith then cuts away again and picks up on the image stalled at line two as direct address switches towards a more metaphoric, topographical image of the city as it 'Sits on its craggy spine'. This image is expanded, building on the suggestion of powerlessness:

This empty capital snorts like a great beast  
Caged in its sleep, dreaming of freedom.

(K.K.L. p. 7)

Just as this more overtly 'poetic' image is filtered into the weave it is once more immediately undercut with commentary:

But with nae belief,  
Indulging an auld ritual  
Whase meaning's been forgot owre lang,  
A mere habit of words – when the drink's in –  
And signifying naething.

(K.K.L. p. 7)

The texture here, even in these opening lines, is a complex one, incorporating levity, jauntiness, sharp, convoluted symbolism aligned with bleak and pessimistic observation of the city's make-up, its character and what that can represent in broader terms. Already here though, the darker side of Goodsir Smith, which, more characteristically, is deeper and more balanced in the weave of his work, is much closer to the surface, assuming an unusual dominance.

As section one of the poem unfolds, that dominance becomes more and more evident. The syntactic circumnavigation is sustained, creating

a series, a flow, of levels and peaks, mirroring the discursive trajectory of Goodsir Smith's train of thought. This harmonisation, suggestive of a musical structure, moves and twines through the more low-key development of conventional poetics – here, as the initial images attendant to the beast are returned to and filled out, the enlargement of a background coda: 'A beast wi the soul o' an auld runckled whure,' (K.K.L. p. 8), images consciously echoing *Under The Eildon Tree*. These discursive, level phases lead on deceptively simply through analogy and correlation to peak in explicit statement of the points *implicit* in the more tangential suggestions precipitated by the city scenario. Here again, the statement is bleak and dark with an unsettling, lurking bitterness, simultaneously, the scenario is widened to focus the angle of attack on Scotland in its entirety:

Ye dour gurlie city, capital o' a land  
 That sells itsel for greed  
 And nane to blame but us oursels,  
 A land whase rulers sellt theirsels langsyne  
 And nou watch out her death-throws without thocht,  
 (K.K.L. pp. 8–9)

The increasing dominance of the poem's pessimism is compounded as Goodsir Smith returns to the outlaw figures, counterpointing the lines above: 'A wheen stubborn chieles / As in the days o' your granderie / That winnae bow the heid – ' (K.K.L. p. 9). Once more, the outlaws here are drawn as defused, impotent:

But hae nae pouer to act  
 Nae voice, nae act, juist acted on,  
 A pensioner that cannae afford his pride nae mair  
 And cannae sell his poverty to mend it.  
 (K.K.L. p. 9)

The harsh ironies of these last two lines are also developed and stacked, layer on layer, as section one of the poem pans out to scan a wider view of the city. The panorama is at once phantasmagoric and ahistorical, indeed much of the poem deals with ways in which we have been *dislocated* from our own history. That James Hogg, the

Ettrick Shepherd, has metamorphosed to the 'Electric Shepherd' in contemporary parlance, is more than a poor pun on Goodsir Smith's part, rather, a commentary on contemporary dislocation from our own literary inheritance.

As the scope widens the focus homes in momentarily on the emblematic figure of 'Kynd Kittock', 'Humped in a doorway stinko as a Bacchic maid' (K.K.L. p. 10): a timeless representative, at once, of the degradations our society can inflict, and, the survival, if also the fate, of that wild and downtrodden spirit. A spirit stifled by the 'Edinburgh bourgeoisie' just as 'Kynd Kittock' was by the 'bourgeois joys o' Paradise'. Once more though Goodsir Smith takes a characteristic, parenthetical side step. Noting of Kynd Kittock, '– She dee'd o' drouth five hunder years sinsyne', he adds almost sarcastically, '(But ye'll no ken o' this)', once more, a dig at the distance we have moved, or been pushed, from our own culture.

As the focus scans out over the populace, other vagabonds and refugees, casualties of the system, are picked out and identified. Old soldiers, veterans, used up, given medals and no more, save an 'empty grate in some foosty single-end' (K.K.L. p. 11). In the wake of this catalogue of travesty there is a further shift in tone, verging, towards the section's conclusion, on the didactic. Here the significance of the underlying history theme is drawn to the fore and made more explicit. The central point is, that if such figures have been manipulated and damaged, they have, ironically, in passing served to sustain the corruption of our history, implicitly by failing to change *their* present, the catch though leads us back to the existential, the individual's responsibility for the nature of the society in which he lives:

Sae mock them nocht.  
For you are history tae; yon's the rub.  
See that ye mak mair siccar than your faithers did –  
For time is short the day  
And's gettin shorter as the hours flee...

(K.K.L. p. 12)

On the didactic front then, this is a call to face up to the responsibilities of our *own* present, not just to accept the status-quo, a 'message' we can track back to 'The Wanderer'. Here again though the tone is more disdainful, less optimistic. As the camera moves on once more to take in the faces on the streets; spacemen, millionaires, 'a bobby', through

to Hearts and Hibs players, Goodsir Smith closes on a lament, at once for the dislocations that lead to emigrations *and* for that effective abandonment of dealing with the Scotland we have in many ways brought on ourselves:

And aa the lave will flee  
 Frae their crippling history  
 That they ken nocht aboot  
 Like their faithers before them  
 – And dae fine in the States maistlike,  
 The usual story.

(K.K.L. p. 12)

From the ostensive guided tour of Edinburgh then, the poem has moved a considerable distance, with the closing line of this section more accurately summing up what Goodsir Smith is really aiming at here: 'This is our history nou, in action' (K.K.L. p. 12). Section one of *Kynd Kittock's Land* then lays the ground-plan for the work as a whole, establishing the structural principles, annunciating the central themes. This section though is also the most stylistically compressed, the longest, with its shifts in mood and tone the most radical.

#### 4

The succeeding sections of the poem develop and focus around different subjects, themes, situations and activities initiated in section one. The poem unfolds, with sometimes almost eccentric stylistic juxtapositions, to elaborate central points and scenarios before finally concluding with 'Kynd Kittock' herself allowed her say on the nature of the ongoing proceedings. Section two cuts back into the scan of the city, a central bonding principle around which Goodsir Smith winds his main themes. Here intrinsic ironies attached to the city are further drawn to the fore, notably, reflecting on the Deacon Brodie bar *en route* for the Canongate:

Gang doun the hill. Ye get mair noble  
 As ye gang, or less, past Deacon Brodie  
 Elevated thrice for his thieveries,

Twice on pubs and aince  
For aa time on his ain patent gibbet –

(K.K.L. p. 13)

Deacon Brodie, like his near, fictional, relative, Dr Jekyll, seeming almost the perfect, logical product of the dichotomies personified in Edinburgh itself, gentile by day, nefarious burglar by night. Typically though, while Goodsir Smith can attack the duplicity of the city, he recognises something of the wild spirit in Brodie. Another very real kind of outlaw, with the city itself seeming to precipitate this paradoxical mingling of positive and negative, all aspects of its possible symbolism seeming double-edged, as Goodsir Smith observes, 'Ach, Aliberdeen, you never had the like o' yon' (K.K.L. p. 13).

As section two develops, listing the bars and bards of days gone by, Goodsir Smith takes an explicitly personal turn, bringing the narrative very much to his own front door. Thoughts of the forgotten Fergusson and other 'lang deid bards' draws his mind to his own contemporaries, who are listed in turn:

But ithers rise to tak their places brawlie:  
Grieve and Garioch aye tuim their pints,  
Mackie wheezes, Scott aye propheseezes  
Frae his lofty riggin tree  
While lean MacCaig stauns snuffin the Western seas  
And Brown leads wi his Viking chin  
And winna be rebukit.

(K.K.L. p. 14)

These 'tributaries o' the muse' are drawn into the weave of the poem as further illustrations of the outlaw spirit to set against 'the mean, lang-heidit pencil-nebs / Like terriers yapping at their shades' (K.K.L. p. 14). This is once more, history in action, and as so often in Goodsir Smith nothing over the centuries is seen to have changed. He portrays his contemporaries as 'penurious scribes', struggling, like Fergusson or Burns, harassed by the bourgeois and hardly well-heeled.

Section two of the poem consolidates and expands both the history theme and the catalogue of outsiders confronting the negatives our history is shown to represent, initiated in section one. Section three of *Kynd Kittock's Land* though marks a radical tonal and stylistic deviation. There is a rhetorical overload here, implicitly self-mocking in its excesses,

while at the same time constituting a linguistic bacchanal, celebrating the wilder side of life and the bandit spirit:

Ah, stay me wi flagons, dochter o' Sharon, comfort me,  
 Hain me, compass me about with aipples!  
 Cool this fevered spreit with sevin-frondit docken,  
 Flagons, marjoram, green fields, Salome!  
 Belling beakers, let them be til my hand! Dance!  
 The corn be orient and immortal barley greit!

(K.K.L. p. 15)

Here again Goodsir Smith consciously draws on echoes of the 'Slugabed' persona of *Under The Eildon Tree*; 'stay me wi flagons' is a direct lift from Elegy XII of that poem (p. 40), as is the excessive rhetoric and classical allusion. This intertextual allusiveness serves to raise images of both Edinburgh and the Slugabed from the earlier poem, surreptitiously supplementing the groundwork already established in *Kynd Kittock's Land*. Other strands of seminal postmodern qualities in Goodsir Smith's work materialise here. Notably in Goodsir Smith's own commentary on the poem built into this tirade, he observes in the midst of these excesses: 'Haud and bind this boaster muckle-mou,' (K.K.L. p. 16).

Increasingly then we find Goodsir Smith undermining the texture of his work, counterpointing, if not contradicting, the more serious voice of the earlier sections. The spectre of another of Goodsir Smith's disguises is raised here too, 'The Great Auk in his munificence' (K.K.L. p. 16), raising its own attendant echoes of Goodsir Smith's other 'Edinburgh' work, *Carotid Cornucopius*. This defusion of the serious, of the expected, is in itself a symptom of the outlaw spirit, its aesthetic irreverence denying the conventionally anticipated high tone, the flighty rhetoric calculated to mock itself, while at the same time appropriately symptomatic of the schisms embodied by Edinburgh *itself*.

With the Auk in the background it comes as no surprise to find resonances of *Carotid* following in section four of the poem. Goodsir Smith opens here with a further dislocated commentary on the preceding section: 'The bard is rairan truly' (K.K.L. p. 17). As in *Under The Eildon Tree* there is an ongoing process of recontextualisation, each section reframing the other, continually reshaping the nature of the context in the midst of which we find ourselves, or, as here, temporarily depriving us of a context.

At the outset we are dropped in the midst of a dislocated dialogue, reminiscent of the prison sequence of *Carotid*:

Whit the hell's the laddie at?  
– Flux and floosies, faither,  
Flux and floosies-  
–Eh?  
– I said. – Whit's flux? I ken floosies.  
Or did. Heh! Heh!  
Ay, I did tae. Ken floosies? Och ay, but flux?  
– Och, never heed, it's early yet.  
– Early! Ma Gode, it's late eneuch in the day  
For this deid dump.  
Your Ensign Ewarts and your granderies,  
Yon's fine talk – wi the waas crottlan down  
And the roof lettin in  
And the towrists gowpin up at Wattie Scott the Wizard o' Oz.  
(K.K.L. p. 17)

The initial incoherence functions as the wake to the bacchanal enacted in section three. There is though a subtle shift back towards the poem's main themes, in the midst of which Goodsir Smith integrates yet another voice, here, in a position to comment on the apparently central narrative voice of sections one and two (essentially by commenting on the earlier commentary on the Edinburgh bars, a gauntlet taken up here). So, in the lines above we are drawn gradually back into the Edinburgh tour while at the same time the question of ongoing history is reintroduced with the allusion to '– late eneuch in the day / for this deid dump'.

This initiates a move back into the kinds of commentary familiar from the outset, albeit now in a voice one step removed, building up the carefully layered texture of the poem and complicating our response. Here the 'audience' identity shifts as well, if at the outset ostensibly Edinburgh (actually us), the apparent recipient of these lines is more akin to the anonymous victim of a bar monologue (again actually us); an appropriate relocation of narrative viewpoint given the centrality of bars in the poem so far.

The conclusion of section four of the poem marks a return of the bitter edge apparent earlier in the work and the tone is again pessimistic, almost hectoring in its insistence: 'It's no juist late – it's damn owre late / And fine ye ken it' (K.K.L. p. 18). The abdication of responsibility



is the central bone of contention, explicitly and sarcastically condemned as the narrator portrays his drinking companions as unthinking and trivial. Here the lines from section one, 'A mere habit of words – when the drink's in / And signifying naething' (K.K.L. p. 7), are picked up and amplified. The company only getting round to discussing 'the evils o' the world / and what they'd dae to put it richt' (K.K.L. p. 19) after the bars have closed and the carry-out secured. That nothing *will* be done is signalled in the drunken cliché rounding off: '– wha's like us? Hic!'. If the bar-room scenario lends an intrinsically humorous edge to the proceedings it is also central as a damning symptom in this overt attack on a particularly Scottish brand of complacency, the humour ultimately not even skin-deep.

With section five of *Kynd Kittock's Land* Goodsir Smith begins to wind down the poem, moving away from the intensity of the central sections. This is the hungover dawn in the aftermath of our Edinburgh excursion:

There's nane about but early slaves,  
Lost lovers and broke drunks.

(K.K.L. p. 20)

The techniques employed here, and the perspectives created, are nonetheless increasingly complex. The initial stanzas mark an apparent return to the direct narratorial voice of sections one and two, introducing the dawn landscape. Here again though we find inbuilt commentary on the foregoing proceedings: 'All dune. Diversion ends' (K.K.L. p. 20). This is framed as the proclamation of the dawn itself and functions dually, signalling at once the imminent conclusion of the poem while reminding us of the prefabricated nature of the construction we are in the midst of, defusing artifice *by* further artifice. This draws attention to the fact that we are being manipulated, yet, in the process, deepens the extent of manipulation and complicates the reader's response. Finally we find ourselves drawn to consider not only the nature and future of Scotland but on to a different plane and to considerations of the nature of poetry itself, how and even *if* it functions.

Section five though features further complications and peculiarities compounding these disjunctions. Characteristically for instance we find Goodsir Smith once more deflating his own craft with calculated extravagance, distinctively here in the latent absurdity and elaboration of this opening metaphor:



experience which enables Goodsir Smith to, just, round off the poem on a more positive, assertive, note.

Something of this diversity of experience is mirrored in the varied nature of the dreams cited at the outset of section six:

Some dreams are sleepin in the bottom o' a glass,  
 Some ride in the freezing winds of space,  
 Some snore in the dampest oter o' a tree,  
 Some creep in stanes, some skip  
 Like nymphets through the brattling burn,

(K.K.L. p. 23)

From these perspectives of his own however Goodsir Smith abruptly switches, 'Kynd Kittock, what say ye?' (K.K.L. p. 23), and the shady figure lurking in the back-cloth of the poem is allowed at the last to take centre stage. It is in Kynd Kittock's response that Goodsir Smith frames his summation of the ways of the world, and if ultimately ambivalent, overall here the tone is more positive:

- I'll tell ye what I say, and what I ken.  
 This auld rortie city that ye speak o',  
 (Ken) here we'll be and here we'll bide  
 Come wind, high water and the westren gales -  
 I've been here, and will be, year on year,  
 And I'll be here five hunder yet to come, at the world's end.

(K.K.L. p. 23)

This assertion of survival implicitly inter-relates with the framework Goodsir Smith has established concerning the diverse outlaws and outcasts representing the fully free and human spirit, perpetually under threat but tenaciously hanging on in the unlikeliest places. Here Kynd Kittock epitomises that tenaciousness and at the same time the paradox underlying the poem as it underlies our entire existence: the rortie and the wretched inescapably bound, a further concomitant of the balancing of contrary forces and experiences in the midst of which we must live, which we must accept - or be defeated by our own lives.

Such elements too are central to the structural deviations in the poem itself, from high flown rhetoric to earthy observation, from serious commentary immediately defused in the text with attendant mockery: the web of fused contraries pervading all levels. This in turn draws

us once more to the city of Edinburgh, contrariness personified, and it is Kynd Kittock who is allowed to state the range of that inherent symbolism: 'Embrou toun is me and me is it – d'ye see?' (K.K.L. p. 24). But if the words are ostensibly those of Goodsir Smith himself, the veering nature of his diverse moods, inclinations and directions, as well as an inroad to the complexity epitomised in his finest work.

Bearing such aspects in mind it is no surprise to find that Goodsir Smith does not allow this note of positivism to surface untempered. Kynd Kittock here makes the most explicitly optimistic statement of the entire poem: 'Times aye cheynge and this auld runt / Will flouer again,' (K.K.L. p. 24). Implicitly, however daunted the free spirit may seem its seed is safe with the outcasts and rebels, safeguarding its essence for better times. However as Kynd Kittock takes her leave Goodsir Smith cannot resist casting a shred of doubt on this confidence: 'I'm gettin gey auld and wearie... / Sleepie... my grey heid hings...' (K.K.L. p. 24). As we are left with a signing off in a row of dots and a contrary statement we are back to a position where ambivalence and uncertainty prevail. As the anonymous voice of section four observes: 'Whit the hell's the laddie at? / – Flux and floosies faither,' (K.K.L. p. 17). So, as in so much of the work, it is flux which holds sway, a point clearly drawn home as Goodsir Smith closes the poem, making the balancing of forces plain:

And shall she get the richts o' it,  
A diadem for the brou?  
Shall Scotland croun her ain again,  
This ancient capital – ?  
Or sell the thing for scrap?  
Or some Yankee museum maybe?  
I'll be here bidin the answer . . .  
Here I be and here I drink,  
This is mine, Kynd Kittock's Land,  
For ever and aye while stane shall stand –  
For ever and aye till the World's End.

(K.K.L. p. 25)

*Kynd Kittock's Land* then stands with the likes of *Under The Eildon Tree* and *Figs and Thistles* as among the finest achievements of a complex career. Its fusion of humour and the debate of serious issues, its sheer diversity, variety of tone, style, persona and mood, the ambitiousness

of its structure and the plethora of ideas incorporated in its scheme, a testimony to so much that is central in assessing Goodsir Smith's ultimate achievement.

This poem's comparative neglect, is on the one hand, part and parcel of the more general underestimation of Goodsir Smith's significance, attendant to this though, the extremely deceptive simplicity of the work's surface veneer has worked against inviting detailed analysis. *Kynd Kittock's Land* remains the most seriously under-rated work in Goodsir Smith's considerable output, and, if in some of the later work such as 'The Twa Brigs', discussed at the outset of this chapter, there may seem to be a falling away, *Kynd Kittock's Land* stands as the crowning achievement of an intensely creative and radically experimental writing life.

## 5

In a letter to Alexander Scott, Hugh MacDiarmid wrote:

I think it is your best book – and certainly almost the only substantial verse contribution to the Lallans movement outside mine. Sydney is a different category.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately MacDiarmid does not expand on the full implications of this oblique and intriguing remark. By way of concluding this study though, I will move away from direct consideration of the poetry *per se* and go on to take a look at just what Goodsir Smith's categorisation *is* (or *should be*). In clarifying this issue there are a number of areas to bear in mind. How do we place Goodsir Smith in the development of twentieth century Scottish poetry? Was his often highly experimental approach ultimately a success or a failure? Which of his works have best withstood the passage of time and remain of importance in the contemporary situation? In short, what is still worth reading, what has his influence been on more recent, contemporary poetry?

There are diverse ways of approaching these issues but the most pertinent inroad is to take a brief look at Goodsir Smith's last years and to consider too the nature of the literary climate of the seventies and how Goodsir Smith's work looked at the time of his death in 1975.

The last fifteen years of Goodsir Smith's life were more settled in many ways, though he remained as active as ever, even though his poetic

output slowed notably. The 50s had seen the end (though they were never divorced) of his marriage to Marion, and Goodsir Smith had taken up residence with Hazel. Initially and for some years they lived with the poet Tom Scott and his wife. By the mid 60s though they had acquired a flat in Dundas Street; a period fondly remembered by another of Goodsir Smith's friends, John L. Broom, who lived at the flat for a while.<sup>8</sup>

He recalls that in this period Goodsir Smith would wander into Milne's Bar in the early afternoon, for his hangover cure, a pint of heavy and an underberg, served by the now almost Legendary barman Bob Watt, to whom all concerned give full credit for the congenial atmosphere of the bar.

By the late 60s though Goodsir Smith and Hazel had moved to Drummond Place, a kind of attic flat, a poet's garret if ever there was one. This was one of the happiest periods of Goodsir Smith's life, sadly terminated with his sudden death in January 1975 at the age of only fifty-nine. While Goodsir Smith's death was deeply felt by all who knew him, in more coldly clinical, purely literary terms, it was unfortunate in other respects, the legacies of which are particularly evident now, in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Compared to the literary climate which grew up during the 80s, and continues to grow in the 90s; publishing healthy, if forever precarious, magazines proliferating, renewed vitality and increasing interest in Scottish literature, and culture, as a whole, most importantly, new, young and often provocative writers pushing in umpteen directions at once – the position in 1975 was rather less optimistic. Not dire perhaps, even though the mess of the abortive 1979 devolution was on the horizon. *Akros* was there, *Scottish International* too, though all soon to vanish. Equally, the likes of Tom Leonard and Alasdair Gray were already emerging, with Morgan and Hamilton Finlay firmly up front of the experimental end of things.

But, although Goodsir Smith was still out and about; Norman MacCaig, for instance, was writer in residence at Edinburgh University in the late 60s and Goodsir Smith would often wander along to talk or to read his work, his diminished output after 1960 had led to a position in which, while admired by his fellow poets, his work was already suffering critical neglect. Effectively, the dominance of that more overtly experimental work from Hamilton Finlay or Morgan in conjunction with the stirrings of something afoot in Glasgow, not to mention the continued pre-eminence of MacDiarmid's problematic 'giantism', left Goodsir Smith seeming something of a background presence.



That position remains largely unaltered to the present day, for, although 1975 saw the appearance of the festschrift *For Sydney Goodsir Smith*, with contributions from contemporaries including Sorley MacLean and Iain Crichton Smith, there has been no substantial critical back-up of the kind MacDiarmid received and continues to receive. Similarly, recent impressive *Collected Poems* from Norman MacCaig, Edwin Morgan and Sorley MacLean have been supplemented by critical studies such as *About Edwin Morgan* or *Norman MacCaig: Critical Essays*, which provide further fire to the present climate of radical reassessment of Scottish literature. Meanwhile the sadly inadequate edition of Goodsir Smith's *Collected Poems*, which hardly enjoys a high profile anyway, remains the main route into Goodsir Smith's poetry. With regard to these points then, we can paraphrase MacCaig himself and note that Goodsir Smith's near contemporaries, for the most part, have 'the advantage / of not being dead yet'.

Other problems though are more firmly rooted in the nature of Goodsir Smith's work itself. Much of that work, as this study shows, remains of considerable importance and relevance to the contemporary reader as well as a potential catalyst acting on younger writers, still more than capable of significantly influencing the direction and nature of modern Scottish poetry. *Under The Eildon Tree* stands as a landmark in its seminal manifestation of the postmodern in literature, the sheer extent of its complex experimentation largely overlooked. Similarly, that poem's illustration of the ways in which a long poem can utilise the elaborate juxtaposition of rhetoric and allusion, persona, idiom, style and form, its balancing of humour with a distinct seriousness of purpose, its intense subjective perspectives, suggests areas of innovation which have remained largely unchallenged by subsequent writers. The problem is that Goodsir Smith must be read in bulk, a problem particularly manifest in virtually every anthology of Scottish poetry in which Goodsir Smith appears, for *Under The Eildon Tree*, understandably, is always represented as a series of extracts, which cannot hope to represent the immaculate patterning of that work: in this way, to read only one of the four books constituting Gray's *Lanark*, one of the few Scottish writers to step into some of the poorly charted regions explored by Goodsir Smith, can give no impression of *that* book's elaborate texture.

The absence of a good and readily available edition of *Under The Eildon Tree* alone constitutes a major rift in the represented fabric of our culture, the work is as unique in its way as MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, in many ways it is the next major step beyond



that poem. A stepping stone and key transition zone, lending coherence to the evolution of modern Scottish literature and casting light on more recent developments, from the works of Alasdair Gray or to the likes of Edwin Morgan's *The New Divan* (1977) through to the more recent experimentalism of Robert Crawford and W. N. Herbert in their joint collection *Sharawaggi* (1990). Ironically, when considered alongside Goodsir Smith's work, principally from the *Eildon Tree*, but *Carotid Cornucopius* to *Kynd Kittock's Land*, are relevant here too, works such as these can seem less radical departures than commonly recognised.

In these respects *Under The Eildon Tree* is of considerable importance with regard to our perceptions of the nature of the development of modern Scottish literature. However, while, say, the work of Alasdair Gray may have much in common with Goodsir Smith's, the extent of direct influence is minimal. In rather less direct terms though the examples set by MacDiarmid and subsequently compounded by Goodsir Smith in exemplifying what can be achieved in the long poem has done much to promote the unusual dominance of that form in modern Scottish literature. A wide range of poets continue to harry the long poem, expanding its possibilities. These include writers as diverse as Iain Crichton Smith, Tom Scott and T. S. Law through to younger writers such as Robert Calder, Tessa Ransford and James Robertson: all radically different writers, each pursuing longer poetries in their own ways.

*Under The Eildon Tree* remains Goodsir Smith's most significant achievement even though its impact and profile have had a restrained influence and limited recognition due to its restricted availability. A new edition of this work, in an ideal world, featuring the drawings Goodsir Smith made to accompany the poem, would do much to re-establish Goodsir Smith in the forefront of any serious consideration of the nature and progression of twentieth century Scottish poetry. Nonetheless the pre-eminence of *Under The Eildon Tree* should not blind us to the substantial proportion of his other work which is also of value and stands the test of time.

Of the longer poems the seminal 'The Wanderer' is important in enabling us to chart Goodsir Smith's growth as a poet, while other longer works, notably 'The Twal', testify to his versatility and his continually evolving approach to developing his work. His other main achievements though are to be found in what could be termed the hard core collections of his work in shorter forms: *The Deevil's Waltz*, *So Late Into The Night* and *Figs and Thistles*, the work from *Cokkils* too,

ranks alongside these much more expansive collections. These works paradoxically can represent Goodsir Smith simultaneously working with compressed intensity *and* in terms of poem sequences, complementing his longer poems. The former category though have proved the most influential, primarily through their higher visibility and relevance in anthologies and the more immediate and economical ways in which they achieve their impact.

That these areas at least of Goodsir Smith's achievement are gradually beginning to filter through to a younger generation of writers can be illustrated by reference to the work of Raymond Vettese. His highly acclaimed *The Richt Noise and Ither Poems*, published in 1988, was greeted by many accolades comparing his achievement to that of the early MacDiarmid. This though has been dismissed as totally off the mark by the author himself and if we take a look at one of his poems it is possible to see quite clearly the presence of a much more familiar territory, this is Vettese's 'Waste':<sup>11</sup>

See him stotter  
whaur tenement stumps  
chaw frae the middens  
o city muck:  
dragons' teeth in rotten gooms.

Nae smiles at windows  
or skirlin bairns,  
nae wash strung oot  
like raws o bricht flags,  
nae heroes welcome.

See him rax oot  
frae tasht bleck sleeve  
an airm for support;  
it's a sair fecht  
bidan upricht here.

Ae nicht he'll skite  
on crackt bitter causey  
and freeze in his bluid,  
his body huddert  
like fremmit land;  
around it stretchies  
uncouthie waste

on whause boondless chairt  
 thin fingers wrote:  
 Here be monsters.<sup>12</sup>

This is very much a poem of the city (another area in which Goodsir Smith was well ahead of his contemporaries), and conjures distinct echoes of 'The Grace of God and the Meth-Drinker'. Scenario aside, there is much here to recall Goodsir Smith, items of vocabulary such as 'stotter', 'gooms', 'causey' or 'bluid' bear Goodsir Smith's hallmark and cross-refer to the 'Meth-Drinker' poem. In the same way that last line, 'Here be Monsters', draws to mind those earliest subjective monsters lurking in *Skail Wind* back in 1941. Most importantly though Vettese is offering us no variation on a theme, he makes this poem very much his own, this is 80s and 90s Britain (or you can as easily step beyond), the echoes here are entirely conscious, used in the same ways in which Goodsir Smith could incorporate such literary cross-references in his work. Here, ironically pointing up a literary continuity while remarking on the degeneration of a society, again ironically coupled to a different kind of continuity, the prevailing dominance of both oppression and disintegration, ironies Goodsir Smith would have recognised and responded to, if hardly approved, except in terms of poetic merit.

Awareness of this kind of intertextuality deployed in this manner suggests that Goodsir Smith's considerable tactical dexterity may yet receive due recognition and is only now beginning to make its impact in the work of younger writers. I have suggested at various stages that Goodsir Smith was ahead of his time, like MacDiarmid before him. Perhaps only now, as postmodernism itself threatens to lurch into literary history, will the success and high merit of Goodsir Smith's eclectic experimentation begin to be examined more seriously and find a far more carefully considered place in the history of Scottish literature beyond that too casually appended, and often implicitly dismissive, role of 'Boozy Bard'. Contemporary critics from Alan Riach to W. N. Herbert continue to wrestle with the less amenable later work of MacDiarmid and I would hope that in the long term this study will serve as a provocation for further in depth studies of the work of Goodsir Smith, a poet whose accomplishments deserve to be placed among the very highest of twentieth century Scottish literature so far. *That*, essentially, is the 'category' in which Goodsir Smith belongs, not as a footnote to 'the Lallans movement' or 'someone who used to drink in Milne's with MacDiarmid', but as a prime innovator working at the extreme experimental edge of our literature.

## NOTES

### NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. The title of this chapter is from *Under The Eildon Tree* (Edinburgh 1948) p. 21.
2. Alexander Scott 'Sydney Goodsir Smith: The Art of Devilment' *Akros* 10 (May 1969) p. 21.
3. See for instance Raymond Vettese's *The Richt Noise and Ither Poems* (Loanhead 1988).
4. Gathered in MacDiarmid's *Sangschaw* (Edinburgh 1925).
5. *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London 1978) p. 74.
6. J. Derrick McClure *Why Scots Matters* (Edinburgh 1988) p. 69.
7. *Under The Eildon Tree* p. 21.
8. *Saltire Self-Portraits 3: Sydney Goodsir Smith* (Edinburgh 1988) pp. 1-2.
9. Author's interview with Hazel Goodsir Smith, 4 November 1986.
10. Access to private correspondence courtesy of Hazel Goodsir Smith.
11. *Saltire Self-Portraits 3* op. cit. p. 4.
12. *Ibid* p. 5.
13. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986.
14. *Saltire Self-Portraits 3* op. cit. p. 7.
15. This point was corroborated in discussion with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986, as well as in private correspondence with Goodsir Smith's friend John L. Broom, 6 May 1989. (They met in 1956 and Broom lodged at Goodsir Smith's Dundas Street flat in the 1960s).
16. 'As with so many people it was like a flash of lightning to my unawakened and groping faculties'. *Saltire Self-Portraits 3* op. cit. p. 9.
17. See Hugh Kenner's *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (London 1965, Methuen's University Paperbacks series) p. 88.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. The title of this chapter is from the opening line of 'Prolegomenon' *The Deevil's Waltz* (Glasgow 1946) p. 9.

2. *The Voice of Scotland* made later appearances in 1944–49 and 1955–58.
3. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986.
4. *Saltire Self-Portraits* 3 op. cit. pp. 9–10.
5. With regard to Shelley and 'Alastor'. Hazel Goodsir Smith confirmed the relevance of this aspect in discussion, 4 June 1990. (Meanwhile emphasising the more significant influence of the later, harder, Byron).
6. 'The Ballad of Peter Morrison' has an authentic ring to it but I have been unable to trace a precedent to the tale. Hamish Henderson however has pointed out there was a Gaelic poet of that name. (Discussion with Hamish Henderson, 4 June 1990).
7. These lines recall Pound's 'Epitaphs' where he writes, 'And Li Po also died drunk. / He tried to embrace the moon / In the yellow river.' *Selected Poems* (London 1975) p. 55.
8. For more on Goodsir Smith and existentialism see John Hall's unpublished thesis *The Writings of Sydney Goodsir Smith* (University of Aberdeen, 1982).
9. This was initially due to his contact with Polish refugees. Author's interview with Sorley MacLean, 19 November 1986.
10. See *Akros* 10, 28 (August 1975) p. 37.
11. Goodsir Smith's Scots here impressively accommodates Villon's French and accomplishes a tonal veracity. Work on translation of Villon was unfortunately not pursued. (Author's interview with Hazel Goodsir Smith, 23 January 1987).
12. 'The Widdreme' was Sorley MacLean's poem, he translated it from Gaelic into English, Goodsir Smith re-worked it into Scots. (Author's interview with Sorley MacLean, 23 January 1987).
13. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect see David Murison's essay in the festschrift *For Sydney Goodsir Smith* (Loanhead 1975).
14. For further reference on Prometheus and Pandora, see for instance *Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary* (London 1910, Everyman edition) from which the quoted material here is taken (p. 431 and p. 377 respectively).

### NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. The title of this chapter is from *Under The Eildon Tree* (1948 edition) p. 15.
2. For a detailed discussion of the correlations between *Under The Eildon Tree* and 'Homage to Sextus Propertius' see Eric Gold's

- Sydney Goodsir Smith's *'Under The Eildon Tree': An Essay* (Preston 1975).
3. This was published for The Saltire Society by Oliver and Boyd, at that time ensconced at Tweeddale Court just off Edinburgh's High Street.
  4. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig 15 October 1986. This period apparently sickened both writers of rum for life. This, in conjunction with the barman being 'a bastard', was the main reason for abandoning the Cafe for the Rose Street pubs.
  5. Author's interview with Hazel Goodsir Smith, 4 November 1986.
  6. Kurt Wittig *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh 1958) p. 295.
  7. Alexander Scott 'Sydney Goodsir Smith: The Art of Devilment' *Akros* 10 (May 1969) p. 26.
  8. See 'Thomas the Rhymer' in *The Scottish Collection of Verse* edited by Eileen Dunlop and Antony Kamm (Glasgow 1985) pp. 245-247. This poem was one of the catalytic factors in suggesting the genesis of *Under The Eildon Tree*.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. The title of this chapter is from *Under The Eildon Tree* (1948 edition) p. 28.
2. Alexander Scott 'Goodsir Smith's Masterpiece' from the festschrift *For Sydney Goodsir Smith* (Loanhead 1975) p. 11.
3. See Ezra Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' in the *Selected Poems* (London 1975) p. 98.
4. Norman MacCaig 'The Poetry of Sydney Goodsir Smith' *The Saltire Review* 1 (April 1954) p. 18.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. The title of this chapter is from the poem 'Luve's Thirldom' *So Late Into The Night: Fifty Lyrics, 1944-1948* (London 1952) p. 32.
2. Goodsir Smith and his first wife were never divorced and he only married Hazel subsequent to Marion's death.
3. Extracts from *Colickie Meg* have been published as:  
(a) 'Auxtact frae Colickie Meg: A Dramme or Ploy in Twa Axts' *Lines Review* 10 (December 1955), pp. 11-15.



- (b) 'Aukstract frae Colickie Meg, The Carlin Wife o' Ben Nevis: A Terrible Dramme in Twa Acts and an introvale' *Jabberwock* 5 (1958) pp. 7-10.
4. Goodsir Smith had first encountered Sitwell during his time in London, see Chapter One, and later in Edinburgh when Sitwell was on a reading tour. (Discussion with Hazel Goodsir Smith 20 August 1990).
  5. Higginson was a long time acquaintance and correspondent of Dickinson's. See the introduction to *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (London 1982) p.vi.
  6. There is an odd echo of the conclusion to Yeats' 'The Second Coming' ('What rough beast - ') in these lines. See Yeats' *The Collected Poems* (London 1972) pp. 210-211.
  7. 'Leander, the famous youth of Abydos, who swam every night across the Hellespont to visit Hero, the priestess of Aphrodite, in Sestus. One night he perished in the waves; and when his corpse was washed next morning on the coast, Hero threw herself into the sea.' *Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary* (London 1910) p. 302.
  8. Nonetheless, there are certain allusions in *The Aipple and the Hazel* on which to this day Hazel Goodsir Smith is unwilling to elaborate. (Author's interview, 4 April 1986).
  9. Although the fact that the hazel, the ninth tree in the alphabet of trees dealt with by Graves, was of central importance, the number has other related significances derived from the trinity of trinities:  
 'Three being the trinity represents a perfect unity, twice three is the perfect dual and thrice three is the perfect plural. This explains the use of nine as a mystical number and also as an exhaustive plural, and consequently no definite number but a simple representation of plural perfection.'  
 (*The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, New York, 1978 edition, p. 890)  
 In this respect nine is of aesthetic relevance to Goodsir Smith as regards the wholeness of the sequences.
  10. One such example which links to the poetry is a tiny clock Goodsir Smith was given as a child in Egypt, this features the figure of Orpheus beating out the hours: he presented the clock to Hazel as a gift in the early 50s.
  11. Hazel Goodsir Smith described the place as 'The most bohemian place I've ever set foot in.' (Author's interview, 4 April 1986).
  12. Author's interview with Hazel Goodsir Smith, 14 May 1986.
  13. It should be noted that this poem is included in the later *Figs and Thistles* (1959) in a much more elaborately punctuated form. (See *Figs and Thistles* pp. 50-51).
  14. The three short collections were conceived as New Year presents



- for Hazel (discussion with Hazel Goodsir Smith, 23 January 1987).
15. See *New Approaches to Ezra Pound* edited by Eva Hesse (London 1969) p. 209.
  16. One poem from *Omens* not discussed here is 'Time be Brief' opening the collection. That poem appeared in *The Aipple and the Hazel* and is considered in that context. The poems are interesting to compare though, since the latter version although identical in most respects differs in that the punctuation has been virtually obliterated and two dashes substituted, an indication of Goodsir Smith's experimentation in paring works down in this period.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. The title of this chapter is from *Carotid Cornucopius* (1964 edition) p. 24.
2. A further play, *The Stick Up* (Edinburgh 1969) tends to be similarly dismissed.
3. There is another play existing only as an unpublished ts, *Rebellion '45*. This was written shortly after *The Wallace*, very much as a successor and in a similar vein to that play though lacking the same impact. (Access to unpublished tss courtesy of Hazel Goodsir Smith).
4. In his autobiographical letter to Maurice Lindsay, Goodsir Smith wrote: '— you should be able to extract a detail here and there that may amuse or interest without shocking the polite souls of that estimable Society.' (*Saltire Self-Portraits* 3, Edinburgh 1988, p. 12).
5. 'The Auk' was a persona as well as a nickname often adopted by Goodsir Smith and is central to *Carotid*.
6. *Carotid Cornucopius, caird o the Cannon Gatt and voyeur o the Outluik Touer: his splores, cantraps, wisdoms, houghmagandies, peribibliatiouns and all kinna abstrapulous junketings and ongongs about the high toun of Edenberg, capitule of boney Sotland. A drammantick, backside, bogbide, bedride or badside buik in-containuenting shree hunder an sixty-five fitts, ane for ilka nicht o the rear wi a pologue & a peppybogue. By Gude Schir Skidderie Smithereens o Crankmirligo and the Clinks, Barmint*  
.....
7. Since Goodsir Smith's death in 1975 Hazel Goodsir Smith has given a selection of these letters to the N.L.S.

8. See *A Garioch Miscellany* edited by Robin Fulton (Loanhead 1986) p. 130.
9. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986. This view was more forcefully expressed in words comprised primarily of four letters relating to excretion. He went on to describe the book as a waste of time and an 'excuse for sex jokes and Sydney's damned toilet humour'.
10. MacDiarmid states in his foreword to the book that Goodsir Smith has done for Edinburgh what Joyce has done for Dublin (p. 18). (Characteristically MacDiarmid is quoting himself from *The Voice of Scotland*).
11. Linda Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. (London/New York 1988) p. 11.
12. David Lodge 'My Joyce (1982)' *Write On: Occasional Essays, 1965-1985* (Harmondsworth 1988) p. 57.
13. Gerald Graff 'The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough' *The Novel Today*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury (London 1977) p. 220.
14. Anthony Burgess *Here Comes Everybody* (London 1965) pp. 188-189.
15. *A Poetics of Postmodernism* op. cit. p. 11.
16. Kurt Schwitters : 1887-1948. Ignored by Berlin Dada, Schwitters founded his own one-man movement 'Merz'.  
    'Fumms bo wo taa zaa Uu,  
                pogiff,  
                kwii Ee  
from his *First Draft of a Sonata* suggests a possible origin for Goodsir Smith's parody.
17. A phrase abducted from Alasdair Gray's book of short stories of the same title.
18. This point suggests a further antecedent to the work of Alasdair Gray in *Lanark*. The picaresque element here also recalls the work of Thomas Pynchon in a work like *V or Gravity's Rainbow*.
19. I have written tentatively of these aspects in 'A Route Maist Devious: Sydney Goodsir Smith and Edinburgh' *Cencrastus* 33 (Spring 1989) pp. 6-9.
20. Another point suggesting an echo of Gray's work in 1982 *Janine*.
21. Introduction to *Carotid Cornucopius* p. 18.
22. Gerald Graff 'The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough' *The Novel Today*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury (London 1977) p. 220.
23. Anthony Burgess *Here Comes Everybody* (London 1965) p. 266.
24. Burgess in *The Literary Review* 32 (1 to 14 January 1981) p. 9. The piece was a review of *The Age of MacDiarmid*, eds. Scott and Davis.

25. It is ironic and appropriate here to bear in mind that scenes from *Colickie Meg* are later incorporated in the revised *Carotid Cornucopius* of 1964.
26. *For Sydney Goodsir Smith* (Loanhead 1975) p. 68.
27. Allen Wright: 'A Move to the Front of the Festival Stage' *The Scotsman* (12 August 1985). This article originally drew my attention to this point.
28. David Hutchison: *The Modern Scottish Theatre* (Glasgow 1977) p. 9. A useful reference for more detailed discussion of this topic.
29. Trevor Royle: *The Macmillan Companion to Scottish Literature* (London 1983) p. 184.
30. Cairns Craig (Ed.): *The History of Scottish Literature Volume 4* (Aberdeen 1987) p. 182.
31. From the *Times Literary Supplement* (2 September 1960).
32. From *The Scotsman* (23 August 1960).

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. The title to this chapter is from the poem 'Apparences' *Figs and Thistles* (Edinburgh 1959) p. 16.
2. See for instance Sorley MacLean's discussion of 'Credo' in his essay 'Figs and Thistles' in the festschrift *For Sydney Goodsir Smith* (Loanhead 1975).
3. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986. Dismissing one of MacDiarmid's 'grand old men' portrayals, MacCaig swept an arm at Goodsir Smith's drawing of MacDiarmid, saying 'I'd far rather have that drunken scrawl'.
4. See Kenneth Buthlay's edition of MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (Edinburgh 1987) p. 37.
5. Interview with Sorley MacLean, 19 November 1986. It was during the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s that Sorley MacLean and Goodsir Smith were closest. This was due in part to Goodsir Smith's inability to enlist (he was turned down due to his asthma), and, to Sorley MacLean's serious leg wound which resulted in their being together in Scotland while most of their other friends were abroad (or in jail). Later in the 1940s Sorley and his wife lived for a time with Goodsir Smith and his first wife Marion. Goodsir Smith had extensive contact with Polish refugees during the war (working among them as an English teacher in Fife among other places) and believed the then prevailing view, now debatable, that Russian forces deliberately held back to allow Germany to devastate the Poles. Apparently Goodsir Smith and

- CMG would never discuss politics since both recognised their mutually respected positions were irreconcilable.
6. 'Whether I read this pregnant thocht in ane of his works or heard the bard tell it in conversation I canna just richtlie mynd; for all that, it's an *IMMORTEL* or evergreen in C. M. Grieve's life and work. Mair's the pitie, neither he nor I can track it down til a richt context – but it byles down til this: Grieve is a dour and unregenerate Scots Republican, but (says his theorie) gin siccan a government wan throu til the seats of the michtie the morn's morn, his sel wad be the firstmaist gangan intil opposition'. (*Figs and Thistles* (Edinburgh 1959) p. 27.)
  7. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986.
  8. Hugh MacDiarmid *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920–1976* Vol. 1 (London 1978) p. 107.
  9. Interview with Norman MacCaig, conducted by Raymond Ross, in *Cencrastus* 8 (Spring 1982) p. 16.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1. The title to this chapter is taken from *Kynd Kittock's Land* (Edinburgh 1965) p. 7.
2. Discussion and correspondence with Stanley Roger Green, specifically 23 June 1990, supplemented by various discussions throughout that year.
3. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986.
4. This was by no means a unanimous view among artists. Sheena Lawrie, widow of the artist, Hamish Lawrie, recalls that both she and her husband felt that whatever Goodsir Smith's writing on painting lacked in academic or technical terms was amply compensated for in that he made you want to rush out and see the exhibition. (Discussion with Sheena Lawrie, 4 November 1986).
5. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986.
6. Citations from *Poet's Quair: An Anthology for Scottish Schools*, edited by David Rintoul and J. B. Skinner (Edinburgh 1950) pp. 47–48. This was a favourite anthology of Goodsir Smith's and, coincidentally, Dunbar's ballad is located only a few pages from Goodsir Smith's other great favourite 'Cupid and Venus' by Mark Alexander Boyd (p. 51).
7. *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, edited by Alan Bold (Edinburgh 1984) p. 717. The letter was dated 10 July 1968.
8. Private correspondence with John L. Broom, 6 May 1989.

9. Author's interview with Norman MacCaig, 15 October 1986.
10. From Norman MacCaig's 'Assisi' *Collected Poems* (London 1990) p. 155.
11. I have written tentatively of this in 'Chasing The Edge of the World' *Cenchrastus* 32 (New Year 1989) p. 50. Other points confirmed in private correspondence with Raymond Vettese, January 1990.
12. Raymond Vettese *The Richt Noise and Ither Poems* (Loanhead 1988) p. 33.

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2. Other Relevant Works by Sydney Goodsir Smith.
3. Unpublished Manuscripts by Sydney Goodsir Smith.

### *Section B:*

1. Books Edited by Sydney Goodsir Smith.
2. Magazines Edited by Sydney Goodsir Smith.

### *Section C:*

1. Books and Pamphlets (General).
2. Articles and Theses (General).

## SECTION A

1. *Books and Pamphlets by Sydney Goodsir Smith.*

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*Carotid Cornucopius: The First Four Fitts* (Glasgow 1947). This edition was privately printed for members of the Auk Society.

- Selected Poems* (Edinburgh 1947)  
*Under The Eildon Tree* (Edinburgh 1948)  
*The Aipple and the Hazel: Poems* (Glasgow 1951)  
*A Short Introduction to Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh 1951)  
*So Late Into the Night: Fifty Lyrics, 1944-1948* (London 1952). This collection featured a preface by Edith Sitwell.  
*Cokkils* (Edinburgh 1953)  
*Under The Eildon Tree* (Edinburgh 1954). Revised edition.  
*Omens: Nine Poems* (Edinburgh 1955)  
*Orpheus and Eurydice: A Dramatic Poem* (Edinburgh 1955). This work was written for radio and was first broadcast on 29 March 1949 featuring music by Cedric Thorpe Davie.  
*Figs and Thistles* (Edinburgh 1959)  
*The Vision of the Prodigal Son* (Edinburgh 1960). This work was written on commission for the BBC and was broadcast on 25 January 1959 for the Burns Bicentenary.  
*The Wallace: A Triumph in Five Acts* (Edinburgh 1960)  
*Carotid Cornucopius* (Edinburgh 1964). This was a revised and extended edition with illustrations by Rendell Wells, with a foreword by Hugh MacDiarmid.  
*Kynd Kittock's Land* (Edinburgh 1965). This work was commissioned by the BBC and was first broadcast on 28 February 1964.  
*Gowdspink in Reekie* (Edinburgh 1968). This poem first appeared in *Saltire Review* 2 (Autumn 1955) pp. 42-52.  
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*Carotid Cornucopius* (Edinburgh 1982). This was a re-issue of the 1964 edition from MacDonald.  
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- 'Gowdsmith in Reekie' *Saltire Review* 2 (Autumn 1955) pp. 42-51  
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 'Aukstract frae Colickie Meg, The Carlin Wife o' Ben Nevis: A Terrible Dramme in Twa Acks and an introvale' *Jabberwock* 5 (1958) pp. 7-10

### 3. Unpublished Manuscripts by Sydney Goodsir Smith.

- Colickie Meg*. This was a stage adaptation derived from the novel *Carotid Cornucopius*. The manuscript is undated but was almost certainly written during the 1950s.  
*Rebellion '45*. This play was written as a follow-up to *The Wallace*. The manuscript is undated but probably dates from approximately 1963-64.

## SECTION B

### 1. Books Edited by Sydney Goodsir Smith.

- Robert Fergusson: 1750-1774* (Edinburgh 1952). This work contains essays by various writers to commemorate the bicentenary of Fergusson's birth. The introductory essay by Goodsir Smith is titled 'Robert Fergusson, his life, his death and his work' pp. 11-50.  
*Gavin Douglas: A Selection from his Poetry* (Edinburgh 1959). This selection was prepared for the 'Saltire Classics' series and features an introduction by Sydney Goodsir Smith.  
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